

Surreal Grotesque
Issue 6: Urban Legends










Table of Contents

Sisters of the Serpent Christ by Jayson Roland.....	9
The Architect Review by Courtney Alsop.....	17
Art by Devillusion.....	19
Poetry by Devon Hemberg.....	27
The Rib Children by Vylot Hart.....	33
Albert by Joshua Ryan.....	35
And the Devil Made Man by Antoinette Rydyr.....	37
Interview with Ray Garton.....	49
Atabey by Bryan Howie.....	55
Interview with Kathe Koja.....	63
Excerpt from “The Cipher”	65
Welcome to the Slenderverse: Video Game Reviews by Courtney Alsop.....	73
The Slenderman film: An Interview.....	79
Burying Mr. Tennyson by Miriam Smith Camp.....	85
The Origins of Halloween by Mister 13.....	95
In Our Hearts by Douglas Hackle.....	99
Of Dreams and Nightmares: Stephen King in film and television, an overview by L.V. Kramhoft.....	105
Beyond the Jack O’ Lantern: Pumpkin Art.....	110





The Slenderman Mythos.....	118
Through a Blackened Urn by Diego Martinez.....	123
The Slenderman Cometh by Abigail H.....	127
Diminishing Sight by Joseph J. Patchen.....	135
Cinnamon Sticks & Little Beasts by Keith Fink.....	139
Last Best Friend by Jeff Gardiner.....	143
The Rake by DWG.....	150
Cry By Andrew Guerra.....	155
Plain Sight by Jay Wilburn.....	157
The Walking Dead, TV Review by Joseph J. Patchen.....	161
Death from Above, Below by Chris Parker.....	165
Freak Gallery: An Original SG Comic by Daniel Gonzales, writer and Leonardo Magallan, artist.....	168
Special Thanks and Credits.....	173
Gina Ranelli: The Queen of Weird, Book Reviews by Daniel William Gonzales.....	174
El Dia De Los Muertos: Mexican Day of the Dead by Pedro Silva.....	177
The Evil that Men Do by Kent Miller Part 5.....	181
Quiet Room Bears.....	188
Shadows on the Wall: History of Horror Cinema by Tony Cowin.....	191
Gallery.....	196
Next Issue: Cyberpunk Unloaded.....	199





<http://almanegra.deviantart.com/>





Ch
-08-

SISTERS OF THE SERPENT CHRIST

JAYSON ROLAND

Jonah sat at the banquet hall of the Elders and his wives gathered beside him.

Two of them had bellies swollen with his seed, one wife too old for birthing and the fourth, Katherine had a sour womb. Two twin blondes, Lyra and Lira held his sons inside them and also breastfed his other two sons at the dinner table. They held his twin sons lovingly and if the prophet has been correct, the ones that grew in each of them would be twins as well.

Tonight was the eve of the Reckoning. Blood would be spilled, Jonah licked his lips in anticipation.

“Brother Jonah, what business do you bring to the table this night?” Elder Mark said. The stout balding old man stood at the head of the table as his twelve year old wife lay chained at his feet where he fed her scraps. They sat in the banquet hall of the underground crypt, candles shadowed the room in strange shapes and their voices seemed to echo around the room. This was the room where Nagaroath was rumored to have been born years ago through the flesh sacrifice of an angel and demon.

“The harvest festival is being prepared for tonight and we have gathered the seven virgins from the world beyond the gates to sacrifice during the eclipse.”

“Praise Nagaroath!” Elder Martin said.

“Praise Nagaroath!” the other five Elders shouted.

Brother Jonah mimicked the words but did not speak them. He had just turned twenty one this June but had married his first wife at sixteen. She was the oldest, Sandra. Once he had called her mother and it was true that he had emerged from her womb but when she took him to bed at fourteen, she ceased to be his mother and became his promised bride. This was how they kept the bloodline alive. By the time he was eighteen he was allowed to marry girls his own age after his mother had taught him all he needed to know of a woman’s body.

“You came out of this hole and your return inside shall be just as exquisite,” she had told him and it had been. The first time they made love, he had imagined he was back inside her again, in the womb and he had become his own father. He knew that his biological father had been a traitor and tried to leave the commune, he

had been sacrificed in front of him when he was only seven. He could still see his father's pleading mouth as he begged for mercy as they nailed him to the cross. The fires had burned off his flesh quick revealing the pink meat underneath and Elder Mark had cut out his father's heart. Jonah could still see the image of Elder Mark biting into his father's heart and the way the blood had squirted on his face, how they townspeople had cheered and took turns devouring it. When the heart finally came around to him and his mother, they watched him carefully, his mother gave him stern eyes that said he must obey. He knew that if he did not eat the heart, they would kill him and his mother so he chewed. It was tough and thick in his mouth and got stuck in his teeth but he ate it. Later that night he would find a piece of his father's heart in his teeth and save it in a small box in his room. It was a small miniscule piece of fat but it was all he had left of him.

"We are here to announce the true will of Nagaroth," Brother Jonah said and stood up. There was a slight quaver in his voice but he quickly hid it. The image of Elder Mark biting into his father's heart as the blood specks squirted on his face stuck in his mind and there was no doubt as to what he had to do.

"You dare to speak for the Serpent Christ?" Elder Mark said, laughing. His young bride lapped at the water bowl like a dog, her white dress smeared with grease and dirt. Little Pixie was her name, Elder Mark had laid his mark upon her at birth to be his wife and soon as she had her woman bleed he had taken her from her mother.

"He has spoken to me in a dream and when I woke, for three nights I wrote the new scripture."

Elder Mark and Martin glanced at each other quietly, their lips pursued in disgust.

"You really expect us to believe that Nagaroth spoke to you? A mere boy in a dream?"

"Does it not say in the original scripture that Nagaroth spoke to Lucien Charles as a young man, younger than I and told him the seven laws of the Commune? Why is this so hard to believe?"

"What proof have you, boy?" Elder Mark said angrily, spittle forming at the sides of his mouth.

"He has endowed me with power," Jonah said and grinned, "Katherine?"

He spoke to his brunette wife of the sour womb and she crawled up on the banquet feast table, above the wooden carvings of the serpent on the table, pushing aside the still warm ham and the bowl of goat milk. She disrobed and lay upon the table naked. Flies buzzed around the stuffing now and the tiny raisins looked like roaches.

Katherine lay flat on her back and Jonah stood over her and put out his fist.

The Elders stared at him in awe and disbelief, their faces wrinkled in fear and anger. She was desecrating the holy table. Her bare cunt was right above the carving of the snake as if it were about to slide

into her.

The two blondes, Lyra and Lira chuckled and switched the babies to the opposite breast to suckle. Excitement flowed over them, this would be a day that would forever change their history and their community. They turned to each other and kissed on the lips slowly, using their tongues to part each other's lips.

Pixie, the child-bride stood up from the floor then to watch also.

The entire room sat in rapture.

Jonah put his hand out over the prone body of Katherine and began to chant slowly. His litany became a dull hum and his brides followed suit.

“In caligo depths of Duroth mons montis Nagaroth eram prognatus ex cruor of angelus Demiscus quod cruor of everto Nerazia. Nos narro nostrum spondeo expergefacio suus phasmatis quod in septumdecim annus of sulum decade nos dedi a virtualamen of septem virgo ut is may exsisto commodo quod suggero nos per a vigoratus agri of rutilus siligoinis quod vegetus fructus.”

“This is ridiculous,” Elder Mark began, “The Serpent Christ does not answer to—“

Katherine's eyes fluttered open and were a milky white. Her skin took on a strange yellowish tint and she began to spasm as if in seizures. Then slowly her body started to lift and hover above the table, first by a few inches and then she was halfway to the ceiling as Jonah continued to chant at a feverish speed. His eyes turned a strange shade of greenish-black and Elder Mark jumped back in his seat, seeing a glimpse of Nagaroth in them staring back at him.

“It's not possible,” he murmured, “We have ruled this council for fifty years.”

“Yes, you have and you have weakened it, the Serpent Christ demands a new leader,”

Jonah said, “He said things must change. He spoke of a retreat in the desert and weapons. He said it is time to let the world know of our existence and make our stand. He has given me the names and locations of twelve U.S. Senators who we must eradicate to announce our coming to the world.”

“This is madness!” Elder Mark shouted, “I will not be privy to it.”

“You would deny the power of Nagaroth when it is right before your eyes!” Jonah shouted.

The two blondes rose from their seats, laid the children on the table and then moved in such precision that their bodies seem to multiply and suddenly images of them filled the room along with a flashing knife.

The throats of the Elders opened up and there was shouting and screaming.

Then the two women were seated again smirking, picked up the children and returned to breastfeeding as if nothing had occurred.

The men bled into their bowls of soup, clutching at their throats as their faces fell into the wooden bowls.

“Just one left,” Jonah said, “Do you still doubt my power?”

Elder Mark slowly began to back away from the table and stared in horror at the dead Council before him. He watched as Jonah lifted one of the bowls and drank the blood from it.

Droplets of blood dripped off his lips. Katherine’s body was on the ceiling now and she moaned and gyrated as the spirit took her. Her blouse ripped open and cuts started to appear across her skin and blood fell down on the table like rain. The invisible demon ran its claws across her skin and cuts began forming on her legs, the blood rained down over the suckling pig and into the goat’s milk and stuffing. That was when Elder Mark saw the dead hog’s snout twitch and it made squealing noises and jumped towards him. He screamed and fell to the floor.

“Why?” he cried out to the sky, “WHY HAVE YOU ABANDONED ME? I gave everything to you, Nagaroath! I devoted my life!”

“It’s nothing personal,” Jonah said, his handsome wide face looked wholesome as a child drinking cold lemonade on a hot summer’s day. His long blonde hair sitting on his shoulders and his blue eyes twinkled. There were even dimples in his cheeks.

A chain wrapped around Elder Mark’s neck, it was Pixie, his bride. She began to choke him with every ounce of strength she had left in her tiny arms.

Jonah grinned at her. She wrapped another layer of chain around the old man’s neck and squeezed, she thought of all the nights he left her in the basement naked and bruised. There was an audible snap as his neck twisted and cracked. Tears of relief began to pour down Pixie’s cheeks.

“Don’t be afraid,” Jonah said, “You are free now. I promise to protect you.”

The little girl gave him a slow cautious look.

Katherine’s body fell upon the table dead. Her blood leaked off the sides of the table, pooling in small puddles around the edges. The blood began to move and on the concrete below, the image of a serpent began to form. Jonah began to chant again and the twin blondes and his mother fell to their feet surrounded by the dead Elders whose faces were mostly in their bowls of soup. This would be the last supper at the Banquet Hall. Jonah picked up the table and threw it across the room and the bodies of the Elders fell to the ground. All the blood in the room continued to pool in the center of the room and the image of the serpent thickened. Then it started to bubble and turn a dark purplish tone.

“Nagaroth!” Lyra and Lira screamed, “He has come!”

“Quick!” Jonah said, “Prepare the children, he has asked for a sacrifice!”

“The children?” Lyra said, “But—“

“Do not question Him. You already have replacements in your bellies.”

The blondes carried the crying children to him quietly and the dark shadow of a serpent began to pull itself from the ground. Black smoke and dark purple gashes blurred the creature, it opened its mouth to feed. Lyra threw her child to the serpent and heard the screams as it bit into it. Then Lira followed suit. Tears poured down her cheeks, she began to sob.

“Do not fear,” Jonah said, “You have now earned your place in the Kingdom of Heaven. Nagaroth will reward you dearly.”

Then Jonah saw the bodies of the Elders begin to twitch on the ground, they were still dead but a white liquid substance seemed to flow out of them and into the air. It moved in tiny gyrating waves. It’s their souls, Jonah thought, He is eating their souls.

The black snake looked at him then, it’s blood red eyes glistening. It spoke inside his mind.

Open your mouth.

He obeyed.

He saw the streams of black smoke crawl towards him then and felt an amazing surge of power. All the candles in the room went out and they were covered in darkness, only the glowing eyes of the snake were left. It was the size of three human bodies sewn together. Yet when it moved in spirit form it became much smaller and it crawled into his mouth in wave after wave of smoke. He saw visions of past civilizations in his mind, the image of an angel and a demon making love, the true origins of their savior, visions of Heaven and Hell and all the places inbetween, creatures and worlds beyond his imagination or understanding. Ancient languages and texts flooded through his mind and he understood them all. The power was overwhelming. The skin on his arms and face began to rip and tear. Through the cracks there was a second reptilian skin. Nagaroth had seen fit to enter his body and now he was one with Him.

I am like the ferryman from the holy texts who held the twelve spirits of the damned inside him so they could cross the river of the afterlife and escape death. Jonah smiled.

The candles in the room flickered back on them and Jonah’s mother, Sandra stared at him fearfully and in awe.

His shadow was that of a snake but he still had the form of a man.

Jonah turned toward the girl.

“I will make you my new wife,” Jonah said, “I promise I will be good to you and take care of you. The twins will watch after you.”

Pixie looked at him, frightened and trembling but grateful.

The blondes offered her their bosom to rest.

“We are good to children,” they said in unison.

“Come, mother, we have worked to do for the festival tonight.”

Sandra looked at the council of Elders sadly for a moment, “They were all I knew for so long.”

Jonah took her hand, “But every religion must change and evolve or it becomes extinct. We are only as powerful as our Gods are. This is Nagaroth’s time. We are part of something powerful, we can help Him take over the world.”

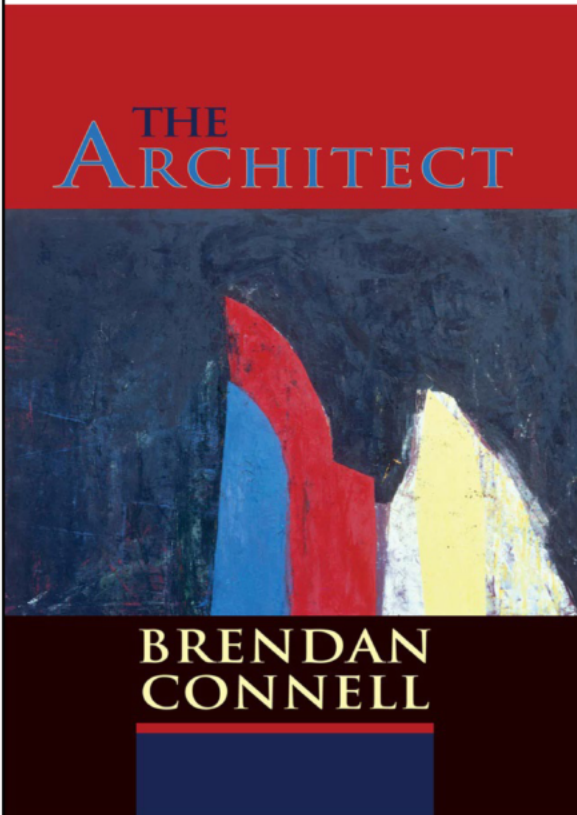
His mother patted him on the head and ran her fingers through her son’s hair, “You are so wise, my son. Let us go then, we shall rip this world apart.”





The Architect by Brendan Connell-

A Review by Courtney Alsop



This novella begins with a group of people known as The Society, the followers of Dr. Peter Körn, spiritual scientist, long deceased. They desire to have a meeting place for the followers to congregate. Their ideals are secure and noble; they wish to better mankind through spiritual growth. To facilitate this they require a building, and hence, an architect. The only one for such a lofty project is one Alexius Nachtman, who has a grand vision for the building, which is situated on top of a mountain.

The project begins. The materials are extravagant. Workers are crushed by the massive stones. They fall off the side of the mountain. Work continues in the winter and it is even more dangerous when everything is covered in ice. They work until they deem it too dangerous and want more money. Instead of giving into their demands, the board decides to have the members of their society build their meeting place. It becomes voluntary slavery. Thousands come. They are fed thin soups and bread and live in unsanitary living conditions. They hang onto the dogma of the teachings as though it will nourish them. Dissent is not tolerated. All of this is made possible by the belief of a higher spirituality, and, of course, the architect himself.

As I read this I wondered how this will turn out to be a horror story. Give it about 35 pages. The absurd comes in, followed by the grotesque. The whole situation becomes outrageous. This all snowballs, gathering momentum page by page and becomes horrifying. At what cost will the building be completed? There is no creature lurking in the darkness, no serial killer, no paranormal occurrences. It is more of frightening obsession. This can be seen in the architect himself, and the cult of people who worship the teachings of Dr. Körn. On page 33, Maria says this of him: ““I don’t mean that I find him frightening in the way one would some sort of monster. . . . No, it is more like standing on the edge of an abyss. I wonder sometimes if his plan is not too—ambitious!””

The architect is unpleasant-ugly, large, a leech, and an avid drinker. He barks orders. He looks down upon those he deems as less intelligent as him. He does not lift a finger to help in the physical labour. As a whole, he is unabashedly selfish and indulgent. The spirituality that they preach is the kind that involves ascending into the cosmos and speaking to ancient spirits and alien races. To ascend you must have faith, obedience, and perform acts of self sacrifice. The mix is a steaming stew so foul a person with common sense would refuse to put in their mouths. And yet the people flock to the religion and line up for a helping.

The writing is beyond engaging. I found no sections that bored my brain and compelled me to skim. It is short and thus easily read in an evening. It does utilize architectural and artist language that might sound foreign, though it does allude to the grandeur and sheer incomprehensibility of Nachtman’s genius. Even if you do not fully comprehend every name and term thrown at you, the tone of the writing makes it clear what is meant. For example, Nachtman responds to the notion of today’s architects:

““Architects? They have not existed for hundreds of years! The morons

you see today building their feeble prostitutions are nothing more than rats in human form, gnawing at scraps of Vitruvius and gurgling the academic banalities of Alvar Aalto. Architecture is a lost science, buried with the Atlanteans. It is a word bandied about latrine-like universities—those places where, when originality occasionally shows its face, like the bloom of the century plant, it is instantly put to death, stoned like a blaspheming Naboth”” (17).

Every detail and description is unique and fascinating. Nothing is wasted. The world is gritty and yet full of pageantry and pretentiousness. Snide paragraphs dedicated to how the rich are ridiculous follow the conditions in which labourers toil flow together perfectly.

The book was an unexpected delight for me. Suddenly before me was a work that kept me reading, made me laugh, made me cringe, and made me remember that with mass hysteria, or faith, basically anything is possible.

If you like your horror to have some high brow literary merit, I highly recommend this.



Devilusion

<http://d3vilusion.deviantart.com> © 2011



DEVILUSION

<http://d3vilusion.deviantart.com> / She Lives By Night / © 2012

DEVILUSION
©2012 Aunt Lucy



• Aunt Lucy •

DEVILUSION

Uncle Elmer

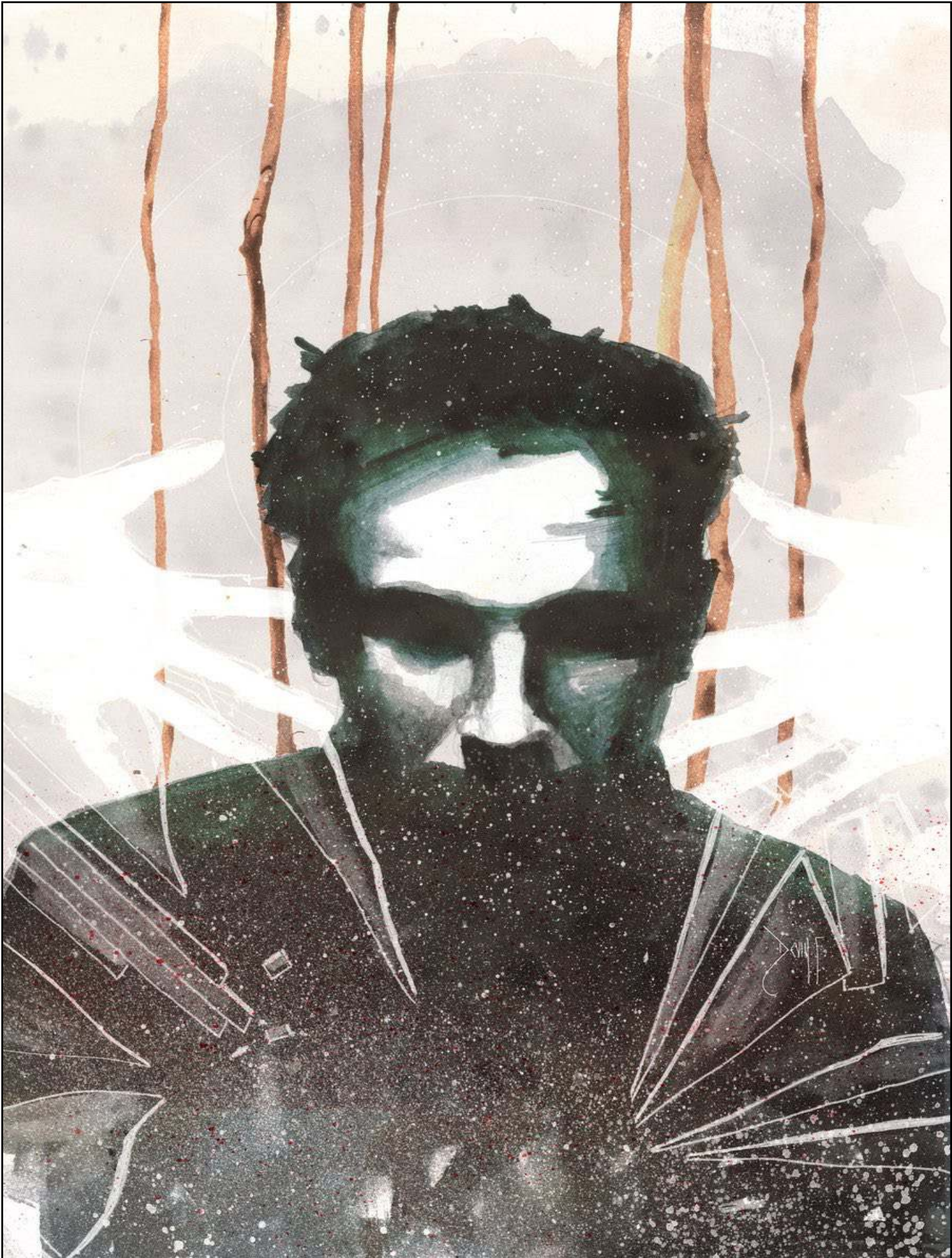


• Uncle Elmer •









Riddle me this, O harrowing demon Poetry By Devan Hemberg

Possess me with a sickness thick with words
that curdles my blood with fatality.
Laugh, with a tourniquet for a tongue
and paralyze speech where emotion once flowed,
the hideous sins of power blossoming on my
skin

And I caressed you, holding you safe within,
this murderous confession ripping at my flesh.
The lies, like lice crawling in packs
looking for the empty salted cracks
where knowledge lay blissfully untapped.

I concealed an arsenal of truths for you,
looked for lessons of the heart in every
hidden clue,
destroyed myself in futile bitterness
and dragged you down, down, down,
to my level of hell that revolved firmly
beyond the ground

and yet, you still speak to me in secrets.
Marring me with a signature, the ritual of a
saviour,
sexualizing your fantasy driven behaviour
to the throbbing orgasm of mutilation to
control
the screams inside my soul.

Riddle me this, my sweet, sweet demon.

necrophiliae

In to the abyss of the night
I crave for mortal wickedness;
Winter moon high in the sky
Cold wind blows from North.

Feeding on our flesh,
gnawing through the bone within.
The apocalypse is everywhere,
A fight we simply will not win.

Her rotting aurora encircles me,
I dug her and caressed her body.
Her coldness pierced my skin;
I'm obsessed with my Necrophilia.

Re-animation of the dead,
their flesh still rotting off.
The fumes produced, so sickening,
stem regurgitating coughs.

In this darkness, I walk alone--
My thoughts hung in cruel ways.
My life has withered ages ago;
No escape from this misery.

Once everything's contaminated,
The living dead - the last to stand.
The remaining are emaciated,
Starved, defeated - an outcome unplanned.

REMENTIA BRABECOX

It's white eyes
projected thirst through the chill of night.
Virgin cloth snagged branches,
as she ran blind in to the trees.
Barefoot and alarmed, she stumbles.

Large gnarly roots drag her to doomsday.
Divided, she falls.
United, they now stare.

Her skin shivers with the imminent,
tiny hairs stand to attention.
His breath on her elixir neck
casts fatal curses on her soul.
Flailing limbs become futile.

He grins with the spirit of Hell,
and with that final lunge -
Dead end.

REFRAIN

My hunger stirs
an ache within you
as violence seeps silently
from inside of me

there's a beast in my chest
I need to set free
I hear it howling
clawing behind my eyes

I will not accept your gentle lies,
my fingers in your mouth
stretching wide
this cave for the Devil inside

for I no longer desire
to simply taste you as you bleed,
it's more of a need
call it erotic fascination

of life outside these bare walls
as we tear down heaven
with crimson handprints
on every side

I want your shades of red
to paint our bitter tale
to say we were here,
we existed;

You were my lover
with lips turning blue
and I breathed in the release of you
where words failed.

Man Made

I've been waiting my whole life
to blow something up,
set the timer on the detonator
and just wait it out.

There's a gun in my hand
but I've never quite been able

to pull the trigger and cerebrally
bleed my way into the
satisfaction of completion
where some part of me believes
there is a world of mindless peace;
how heaven must seem to those
religious sheep
impaling themselves
on white picket fences,
just so they never have to ask themselves
why the world doesn't make sense.

I'm a man-made unintention
born with the gift of self-destruction
like mood ascension was ever
an option
when I've spent most of my days
in the anti-social contemplation of death
my entire being moulded
from fire and brimstone,
the wires in my head
assigned the secret task of
suffocating me slowly via
the disease of dis-ease.

I missed the fatal quirk when it disappeared
for just a little too long
for all the wrong reasons
for all the right reasons
for no reason at all.

I've been waiting my whole
life to blow something up.

There's a gun in my head

And today
it's loaded.

CUTTHROAT SYMPHONY

Pretty little violet flowers
Prim and proper soaked in bleach
See you wither down and cry
Little pretty little Vie

Wilted flowers stunted growth
Beauty dimming hatred grows



Pooling at the terrors feet
Desire for your breath she leaves

Darkness hampers all escape
Swinging silent violent drapes
Crimson licking through the teeth
Looks like burning death disease

Torment sitting lies in wait
Chairs are screaming out their pain
Spikes are driven through the nails
Precious little tiny flails

Bend back metals diamond steel
Thrust through eyes in much detail
Claws ripping down the crest
Forever dirty may she rest

Cutthroat melody so sweet
Open up into the deep
Shallow is the waves beyond
Singing Cutthroat's Symphony song.

Touching teasing
Shoving steam
Don't cross me
Or you won't scream.

DEAD

All I wanted to do was feel alive
outside the bubble of my own chaos.
In the cracking and crumbling of my rib cage
doubled over and gasping for breath
I've never felt less alive.

My fingers entwine themselves
with synthesized torment
that fuck me from every angle
the only hands to rest themselves upon me
a sick illusion

I tear the flesh and rip myself apart
like a ghost smashing the veil
for one last touch of humanity
lost down a well
where a girl once waited
a rope taut around his neck
all air hung from his desperate lungs.

I fracture under the weight of my ability
to never stop grieving
to never stop wanting
to never stop believing
in impossible dreams
that can't be staunched
and bleed my conscious mind
into hollow oblivion.

All I wanted to do was feel alive
outside the bubble of my own chaos.
In the cracking and crumbling of my rib cage
doubled over and gasping for breath
I've never felt more alive.





THE RIB CHILDREN

BY MYLOT HART

It waits in the darkness. Looking on with hungry-greedy eyes, tasting the air with a thick, grey tongue. It is ancient, and it is omnipotent, and it is omnipresent. It can see you wherever you go. It stalks you.

It can smell the fear in the gush of your fresh spilt blood; but it will wait. Until you are weary and too weak to fight it off. And then it will take you.

Drag you down into its lair, a bone-lined earthen den, carpeted with the pelts of dead children. It will eat adults sometimes, but only if it has to; it finds them too tough. It prefers the sweet marrow of younglings. To eat their rosy-sweet flesh, and suck on fresh cracked bones, delighting in the still-living victim's screams.

It does not care about their pain. Not because it is a sadist, it merely has no concept of mercy. No notion of fear. Because it is at the top of the food chain, and you are its favourite dish. No human-wrought weapon can kill it, no ritual can ward it off for long. It is immortal and it can be anywhere and everywhere. And it is so very hungry.

Ancient tales warn of this thing, of dallying in the darkness, in in-between places; places that it likes best. Like the space under your bed, or in the small gap between the bookcase and the wall.

Some people think it lonely, think it's looking for something. That it used to be a man, and it's searching for its children. That would explain why sometimes, just sometimes, it will release a child it has snatched. They will be hearty and hale, though covered in reeking gore, intact save for a single rib.

The adults think it's the work of some sick pervert, a paedophile with a death fetish. The children know better, but then they would, wouldn't they? They say it chains them to a rocky outcrop in its lair, peeling back their skin with the swipe of a filthy nail. With all the skill and brutal delicacy of an experienced butcher. Tiring of their screams, it would stuff dirty rags into their mouths. And it would reach into their chest and yank out a rib, snapping it like a wishbone.

It would burn them with strange-smelling ointments and stitch them up. Dumping them back where it had found them. Most of the children blacked out from the agony, but a few, used to pain from bullying or abuse would watch as the Thing would dip the bone in rotting meat slurry. Observing silently, numbly, as it performed another strange procedure.

These children said it was growing more children; children of its own.

They said the Thing was Adam, still lurking about after being evicted from Eden, unable to die. They said these children were part of an army, designed to challenge God and the Devil. A third option, come the end of the world.

They called this foul brood the Rib Children, and say they're monsters. Creatures that lure away children, bringing them to Daddy's lair. And that the army's numbers swelled daily. The Thing is, after all, a fast worker.

So, do me a favour tonight, and keep an eye on your children, won't you?



JR

Original artwork by Joshua Ryan: <http://www.facebook.com/joshua.kelly>

ALBERT

By Joshua Ryan

Born Hamilton Howard Fish, Washington D.C.
Mental illness had trickled down his family tree.
With no guidance, he was placed in an orphanage
Where he was given the poor nickname, "Ham and Eggs."
In St. John's he suffered horrific brash beatings.
Mistook pain for pleasure; found delight in bleeding.
Still a child at nine, he found gayness in hurt.
Teased for his nickname he wished to be called, Albert.

With his new name stolen from a deceased brother
At twelve, Albert engaged with a boy as lovers
Engaging in practices of the disgusting.
Albert would loiter in the bathhouses, lusting.
10 years later he became a male prostitute,
Arranged by his mother, Albert put on a suit.
A married man now Albert suppressed his wishes
He had six children and all of them, his Fishes.

Albert's wife left him for a handy man named Straube
He was devastated, started hearing St. John.
The hallucinations guided him to self-harm
Then, answered an ad about a boy on a farm.
Albert visited the Budd family at their home
Appeared as a sad old man, helpless and alone.
Albert took ten-year-old Grace Budd that fateful night
Albert hid in the closet to give her a fright
He ate her whole body except, head, bones, and guts
He ate her whole body except, head, bones, and guts.



<http://almanegra.deviantart.com/>

AND THE DEVIL MADE MAN

BY ANTOINETTE RYDYR

The man's face smashed onto the counter. The receipt spike impaled his socket. His ruined eye melted down the steel shaft.

Lifting his head he immediately started screaming.

Royce gave the man a hard whack across his bloody cheek.

"Shuddup! Ya' givin' me a headache."

The man fell back, clutching his battered head, moaning.

Royce picked up a cloth off the counter and wiped his hands clean. He screwed the cloth up into a ball and threw it scornfully at the whimpering man.

"You'll pay double next month or it'll be the other eye. Got it?!"

Royce walked casually out of the Dry Cleaner's. His flesh bristled with aggression.

As he strolled down the street to his next appointment he could feel vitality surging through his veins and popping out as a large angry boil on the back of his neck.

He felt strong. He felt powerful.

He felt good.

Royce Bronson had always been a tough bastard. Even as a youngster he'd been big for his age. And aggressive. So it was easy for him to bully other kids into giving up their lunch money.

As an adult it was a natural progression to become a standover man.

He enjoyed the money power gave him. Frequenting swank restaurants, ate and drank heartily. Dressed impeccably in tailor-made suits. Smoked the finest cigars...

But he enjoyed the power more.

Enjoyed the sound of bone cracking under his brass-knuckled fist.

Enjoyed the squirm of a hand trying to wrestle free from under his spit-polished shoe.

Enjoyed the smell of fear each and every one of his victims exuded at the very sight of his approach.

He lived on that fear. Gave him nourishment. Made him stronger. Invincible.

He was a Titan amongst ants beneath his heel. A force not to be reckoned with.

Violence personified.

A bell tinkled as the barber shop door pushed open, signalling the arrival of a new customer. Royce stepped

inside, stood for a moment on the hard linoleum floor, surveyed his surroundings.

A skinny freckle-faced youth with half his head shaved flicked off his smock, bolted out of his chair, skirted around Royce, skidded. He slipped on a clump of cut hair and landed spread-eagled on the floor, chin first. His teeth drove into his lip.

Abject fear wafted from his body like the roasting aroma of a pig on a spit. Royce sucked in the aroma. A cruel smirk curled on Royce's lips. He could taste the scent of iron.

The youth quickly got to his feet and fled out the door.

Royce cocked his head to the side, cracked a bone in his neck then straightened up. His eyes never strayed from the barber, who stood petrified beside the chair, the electric clippers still buzzing in his hand.

Royce wrapped a hammy fist around the barber's hand, switched the clippers off. And switching the barber on with a cascade of excuses.

"I'm sorry, Mr Bronson, sir, I don't have your money. I do have it. Most of it. You see, my son... Dentists charge so much these days."

Royce's smirk turned into a sneer. He loomed large over the shrinking man.

"I'll get your money, I'll get it now. I just need a few more days to get the rest. But I will get it... Rest assured, I definitely will..."

Royce's teeth clenched, face squeezed into a tight grimace.

His free hand grabbed the slight barber firmly around his scrawny neck, crushing his larynx. Raised him to his tippy toes.

The barber tried to cough a plea but it was strangled out.

His hand holding the clippers was still encased within Royce's huge hand and he felt it vibrate to life again. Felt his hand draw closer to his face.

Heard the buzz louder in his ear.

Felt the sting as the metal teeth slid up beside his mouth and ate his nostril off.

His scream choked in his throat.

He was released into a crumpled heap on the floor, blood flowing down his face into his gasping mouth. Staining his white coat.

Towering over the insect, Royce popped a cigar between his lips and lit it with his sterling silver lighter.

"Better get that dough for me. Now."

The barber pressed a towel against his face and hastily retrieved the money, passed it up to Royce.

Royce counted the wad, then packed it into his pocket.

"Make sure you don't short change me again if yer wanna keep that big snozz of yers."

He stubbed out his cigar on top of the barber's head then exited the shop.

Tall and burly, Royce strode down the street, chest puffed out, back rod rigid. Every pore on his skin excited and tingling.

Passersby cowered, nervously tipped acknowledgement.

"Morning, Mr Bronson."

"Nice day, Mr Bronson."

"Lovely suit, Mr Bronson."

“Excellent weather, Mr Bronson.”

Yep, they all feared him. And that fear felt good.

So good, his flesh slurped it up, gorged on it.

His flesh swelled. Tiny pustules of poison erupted on his shoulders.

He felt his back twitch and undulate as his skin crawled, greedily turning fear into food.

He felt sated, satisfied.

Alive.

Royce continued down the street with a brisk clip in his step.

Arriving at his next destination he was greeted by a metal grill closed tightly over the Tobacconist shop.

Fuming.

That weasely mongrel knew he was coming and shut shop early. But that won't save the little worm. Even now every fibre of Royce's body was siphoning the fear that hung in the air and clung to every brickwork, every tile, every concrete pore.

His muscles flexed and bulged with the anticipation of aggression.

His skin sprouted new angry mouths around his midriff and from those mouths sprang teeth, jagged uneven fangs gnashing and grinding.

His body craved violence.

A few doors down was the Jeweller's. Royce entered the store, noticed the proprietor's wife's artificial leg slip behind the closing door of the back room.

She always retreated out back upon Royce's arrival. And with good reason.

Thinking about the time he obliterated her kneecap and smashed her shinbones gave him something to smile about. The surveillance cameras caught his sardonic grin.

Her husband never welched on a payment after that. Gave him expensive gifts, as well. The silver cigarette lighter, cufflinks, tiepins.

“Mr Bronson! I have your money, sir, all of it.”

Royce snatched the envelope from the jeweller's hand and stuffed it into his jacket pocket. No need to count it. It would all be correct or the jeweller's wife would need a wheelchair.

He relished beating the old biddy up. Didn't touch the husband. Didn't have to. The jeweller heaved his lunch at the sound of his wife's bones splintering.

“I'll be wanting to view your finest necklaces. For my girl.”

“Of course, Mr Bronson. I have some beautiful zirconia - “

Royce's pupils narrowed to snake eye slits.

“... uh, diamonds. I have diamonds for your lovely lady.” The jeweller back-pedalled. Retrieved an elegant creation from within the glass display case.

“A beautiful piece, don't you agree?”

“I do agree,” Royce grinned. “Wrap it up. Gift-wrap it. It's our anniversary.”

“Oh very good. Congratulations, Mr Bronson, sir.”

As the jeweller passed over the gift-wrapped box Royce seized his finger and bent it backwards, breaking

the joint.

The jeweller shrieked in agony.

“That’s fer casting aspersions on my girl with yer cheap whore zirconias. She ain’t no lowlife tramp ya’ know, she’s a classy and educated doll.”

“I’m sorry, Mr Bronson, I didn’t mean...”

“I’ll be back next month. Don’t disappoint me again.”

“No sir, I won’t,” the jeweller wept.

As Royce departed he gave the surveillance cameras an arrogant smirk and impudent wink.

No-one dared cross him.

He was untouchable.

Absolute power and evil corrupted the flesh of the standover man. The follicles on his body stiffen and barbed, became spines. His sins twisted his skin, mutated and moulded the man into a monster.

“Your usual table, Mr Bronson?”

“That’d be swell.”

Personally escorted by the maître d’ Royce marched through the crowded restaurant, head high. All eyes averted, not daring to catch his. Not daring to be ensnared by his.

His table was in a secluded spot, shrouded by greenery. That suited him fine - he hated people.

And people hated him.

It suited the management, too. The owners performed a precarious balancing act between maintaining their patronage whilst obliging Royce Bronson.

They weren’t happy that he chose to frequent their establishment and if they could do something about it they would.

But there were no easy solutions when it came to Royce Bronson.

The last restaurateur to cross him had his restaurant torched. ... while the man was trussed up inside.

The police couldn’t pin the crime on him but all in the neighbourhood knew he was the culprit.

The maître d’ pulled aside an attractive waitress.

“Please give your full attention to Mr Bronson.”

Her cheery demeanour had severely deflated since Royce’s first appearance.

Sullen, she shuffled to his table.

She was the reason he kept returning.

The waitress quivered beside Royce’s table, silently, patiently waiting his attention.

Feigning ignorance of her presence, Royce perused the menu while sucking on a cigar, puffing plumes of smoke.

Eventually, he looked up and broke into a broad grin.

“Hey doll, didn’t see you standing there.”

“Would you like to order now?”

He ushered her to the seat opposite.

“Sit down, doll.”

She did as commanded. Everyone did.

Her head bowed, eyes downcast.

Reaching across the table he lifted her chin.

“Giz a gander of ya’. What a pretty thing you are.”

Meekly, “Thank you.”

“Pretty things deserve pretty things. Got something fer ya’.”

He reached into his pocket and presented the jewellery box with the diamond necklace.

Softly, “It’s beautiful.”

“Here, let me put it on ya’.”

She bowed her head before the executioner. He locked the clasp around the nape of her neck. And lifted her chin again.

“There ya’ go. Gorgeous. Just like you.”

He flipped a curl of hair from her temple and tucked it behind her ear.

Fading make-up betrayed a black eye.

“I’ll treasure it.”

“I promised ya’ something special, didn’t I?”

Gulping, “Y-yes.”

For a brief moment she almost existed as a person. Before Royce returned his attention to the menu and gave his order.

Closing the menu folder, “Just bring me the usual.”

“Yes, sir.”

Just as she got up to fetch his meal, he grabbed her delicate wrist, squeezed it a bit too tight.

“See you after your shift.” Dessert ordered.

“Sure thing, Mr Bronson,” choking off a stutter.

“And call me, Royce. You’re my girl, after all.”

“Yes, M - uh, Royce.”

He released her hand but an imprint of his fingers remained pressed into her smooth skin.

She stumbled off as Royce nonchalantly smoked the rest of his cigar.

She desperately wanted to escape his crab-claw clutches.

But how do you leave a man like Royce Bronson?

She was too scared to stay and too scared to leave.

The Fiend’s talons flicked out like switchblades and scraped down the waitress’s back and buttocks adding fresh openings over healed scars.

She knelt on the bed on knees and elbows, her face resigned on the cold sheet. Trickle of red spread across the white.

A tangle of tentacles whipped and writhed from Royce’s loins, slapped against her tender skin, searching for entry. Finding it. Easy.

The Beast pounded into her from behind. Pushed her forward and back, plumbing her depths, plundering

her soul, depositing his poison.

When he was done he flipped her over and bit her nipple off. Savoured the salt and iron.

She knew not to cry out. Not to cry. Only made things worse.

If they could possibly be any worse.

They could.

Dressed now, Royce took out his wallet, pulled out a couple of hundred dollar bills and left them on the bedside table.

“Here ya’ go, doll. Buy yerself somethin’ nice.”

She didn’t look at him as he left. Continued to look out the window. Into the black.

The truck pulled up the cobbled alley, away from the light, disappearing into the night.

The tobacconist began moving the nefarious pile of cartons stacked outside the backdoor to inside the shop. Picking up the last box, the shadows parted revealing Royce in wan light.

“Missed yer, yesterday.”

“Mr Bronson!” startled.

“Tried to give me the slip.”

“No, no, Mr Bronson, sir, no. I had just stepped out for a moment. Just a moment. To get your cigars. You know, the ones you like. I had - ”

“Keep blathering, you’ll convince yerself one day.”

“No, please, Mr Bronson, I have them. And the money, I have - ”

Royce shoved the little man inside.

Closed the door.

“Sit down!” The tobacconist did as instructed.

Royce busted open a carton of contraband smokes.

“Your cigars, I have them. They’re right there on the desk. Your money’s there, too, Mr Bronson, pleas-”

“Zip it!”

He shut his mouth.

“Think you can fool me?”

“N-no, no - ”

Royce pushed a fistful of cigarettes into the tobacconist’s mouth. Lit them. All.

“Now smoke ‘em, or I’ll smoke you.”

Coughed and spluttered. Cigarettes fell from the man’s lips. He made a dash for the door.

A giant hand grabbed him by the scruff, pushed him back down in the seat.

Taped his hands, taped his feet, taped his body to the chair.

“Please Mr Bronson, sir, please - ”

Taped his mouth.

Royce removed his jacket coat, draped it over a chair back.

Spinning round, Royce’s hammer fist punched the man full in the guts, compressed his innards.

The tobacconist doubled up. Gaspd for air against the tape, sucking in, sucking out.

Two jets of vomit exploded from his nostrils. Royce side stepped in time to avoid the full force but rancid

droplets spattered the shine of his shoe.

Royce's cold orbs bulged with fury. He wiped his shoe with a rag.

Royce unbuttoned his waistcoat and silkshot shirt, opened to his belly beneath. A crude crease stretched across his stomach.

The jagged line split in two, opened to a mutant maw filled with row upon row of serrated shark teeth.

Eyes wide, the tobacconist wriggled in his bonds, struggled in his seat.

The vicious fissure gaped wide, jaws dislocated, extended toward the struggling man. Clamped over his head and snapped it off at the neck.

The headless body jerked and quivered in its seat.

Royce savoured the acrid taste of fear, rolled it around in his mouth with his bifurcated tongue, swooned with the intensity of omnipotence.

The body slumped in the chair dripping blood from the stump.

Royce buttoned up again. Shrugged on his jacket. Pocketed the money and tucked the box of Cubans under his arm before leaving the premises.

Royce had bulked into a monstrosity.

His clothes stretched tight, seams bursting, buttons popping.

The boil on the back of Royce's neck had grown an eyeball. Bloodshot, it watched the tailor as he measured the Monster for a new suit.

The wizened tailor adjusted his spectacles on the bridge of his nose, tried to remain relaxed and unfazed by the abomination before him.

Royce's skin had hardened, forming platelets of chainmail. Bulging between them sphincter mouths dribbled phlegm, jaws snapped and hissed at the tailor. A scorpion tongue lashed out, sliced the back of the tailor's hand. He wrapped a handkerchief around the bloody injury and continued working.

"All done, Mr Bronson, I'll have your new suit ready for you in three days."

"Make it two. I want to impress my girl. Thinking of proposing. Wanna look nice."

"Very good, sir, it'll be done."

"I'm sure it will."

The waitress climbed the stairs.

Venomous ichor leaked out, slipped down her thighs.

Stabs of pain knifed her insides. Skinks crawled inside her body, clawing intestines, nibbling organs, pinching nerves.

She clutched the handrail. Steadied herself.

The skin under her bandaged wrist throbbed. She peeled it off. The Fiend's fingerprints had turned into suppurating wounds of pink pus.

She felt the infection spreading throughout her system, polluting her being. Gorging on her bowel. Soiling her blood. Corrupting her soul.

Worse yet, felt the squirm of toxic maggots in her womb.

Impregnated with poison.

Her aspirations crushed. Ambitions murdered. Dreams turned to gangrene.

Human become inhuman.

Only one choice left.

She hauled herself up, continued to climb.

On the top of the building, on top of the world, she teetered on the edge.

Looked out into the night at a sea of tall buildings with twinkling window lights.

Below, the car and street lights merged into one comforting, cushioning glow.

She wasn't scared anymore.

Royce rounded the corner onto the main street. The emergency crews were already at work. He grabbed a rubberneck by the collar.

“What’s going on here?”

“Didja see that?!” Excited. “Just stepped off the building and splat! All over the street. Right before my eyes! It was a girl.”

He pushed the insect aside, moved closer for a better look. A better feel. Any act of violence fed his corruption.

Royce inhaled a lungful of death, and tasted familiarity.

He knew the girl. Knew what she'd done.

“Ungrateful bitch! Gave her everything she could possibly want. That’s how she repays me. CUNT!”

He turned on his heel. Walked on by.

Forgot the girl

Forgot humanity.

Craving hostility, the Beast hulked through the night sucking up the sin and sewerage of the city.

It bulked and bulged, became huge. Humongous.

Lumbered awkwardly, weighed down by evil, leaving steaming footprints of acidic pollution.

Royce Bronson had had his fill.

Time to give something back to the rotten world that shat him out.

In an alley a pack of scavenging dogs snuffled around rubbish bins searching for scraps. They bristled and snarled at the Monster’s intrusion.

The Monster smiled at the impending carnage and invited the violence. Welcomed the ferocity with which the animal pack attacked. Maniacally laughed as canine jaws clamped down, ripped and rent his contaminated flesh, consumed the tainted meat, absorbed the toxicity and inherited his legacy.

The dogs’ eyes bled red with hatred. Rabid mouths foamed with poison. Mangy skin scaled with scabs of psychopathia. The dogs fled into the night to bite and infect and spread the contagion.

Man invented God, then the Devil - and the Devil consumed him.



<http://clockworkmarionette.deviantart.com/>







10 Questions with a Published Writer: Ray Garton Interviewed by Daniel Gonzales



1. So you have been in the horror writing business for quite awhile now, what do you think the key to being successful in the horror genre is in the long term?

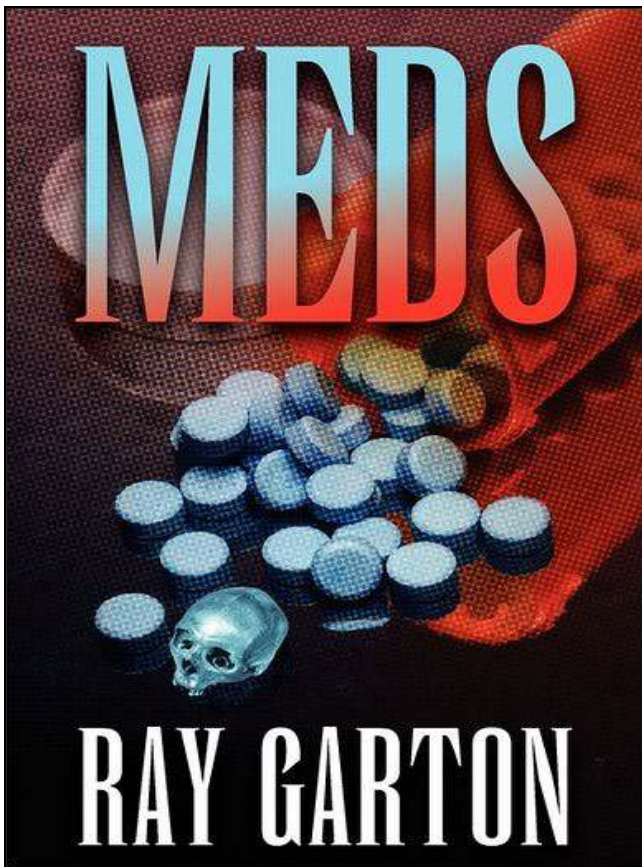
The key to long-term success in the horror genre, as in *many* fields, is simply refusing to go away.

2. Do you think that cheesy horror can be just as meaningful as “serious horror”?

Well, all of it is entertainment. We humans have a tendency to divide things up into categories and label them, so we have many subgenres within the genre of horror. But it’s all horror, whether it’s cheesy or classy, subtle

or extreme, psychological or visceral, monsters or slashers or ghosts. It all comes out of the same cauldron. I think I know what you mean by “cheesy horror.” I grew up on that stuff and loved it. Most of the movies shown on *Creature Features* fell into that category. Low-budget stuff, quickly made, poorly written and acted, really cheap. Movies that look like they were student films from the Ed Wood School of Quality Film Making. Some of my favorites were the giant monster movies, but *especially* the big bug movies of the 1950s. There were good big bug movies with high production values, like *Them!* and *Tarantula*. But then there were the cheesy howlers like *Earth vs. the Spider*, which combined a giant spider with teenagers *and* rock and roll, or *The Deadly Mantis*, which takes itself and its giant praying mantis *so* seriously but is *so* terribly silly.

It’s quite a testament to how influential those old movies were to so many genre writers, myself included, that, for decades now, horror writers have been writing fiction that incorporates those old images and ideas. Joe Lansdale’s great *Drive-In* books are a good example. There’ve been a lot of anthologies with themes related to various kinds of cheesy genre movies and there have been a lot of wonderful stories. My novellas *Nids* and *Crawlers* were really just big hugs to those old movies and the pleasure they gave me. The fact is, I think *most* horror movies are cheesy. Not always *intentionally*, of course, but still. But in the end, it’s all entertainment,



and if it entertains, it's successful. And if those cheesy old movies played a positive role in the childhoods of so many, then yes, they're very meaningful.

3. People like Stephen King have been in the business of writing horror forever and are still going strong, are there any new writers you think that deserve attention or that you have discovered to be particularly talented?

I haven't kept up with the horror genre as much as I used to, but there's a lot of talent there. James Newman, Bryan Smith, screenwriter and director Eric Red just released a great first novel. Mercedes Murdock Yardley is an amazing writer — I've seen her whip up some great stuff off the top of her head just for convention contests. The Snutch Labs writers group is *full* of talent — Sam W. Anderson, Petra Miller, Erik Williams, John Mantoath, Kim Despina and Kurt Dinan. Usually, you're doing well if you find one or two talented people in a writing group, but these people are *all* talented. And I don't think the name of the group is an accident. I think they were

all created in some secret government lab out in a desert somewhere to advance the nation's creative writing capabilities. Those are just a few names that spring to mind, but there are plenty of others.

4. What are your favorite horror films of all time?

I already mentioned my boyhood fondness for giant monsters and big bugs. I think *Them!* and *Tarantula* hold up pretty well today. That says a lot for two movies that were part of a passing movie fad in the red-scary, bomb-creepy 1950s.

I enjoy the old Universal horror movies. As much as I love the iconic Universal monsters, my favorite movie from that studio — and one of my favorite horror movies of all time — is Edgar G. Ulmer's 1934 movie *The Black Cat*. I haven't figured out why yet, but for some reason, that movie just keeps looking better as I get older. It really stands out among Universal's horror films. It's certainly the most twisted and subversive of all those movies. I mean, you've got Satanism, necrophilia, a guy gets skinned alive, Karloff and Lugosi play chess for a woman who doesn't even know she's the prize, and it all has a bad-dream quality to it. And it's just so damned *dark* and *brooding*. Something feels *wrong* about the whole thing. But in a good way. Even the bits of comic relief that are tossed in are like brief little flames that are quickly extinguished. I think that, even now, 78 years later, it probably has the power to make a modern audience at least squirm and wince a little. That would be quite an accomplishment for a Hollywood movie from 1934, because today's audiences are pretty jaded. But we'll never know, of course, because it's a black-and-white movie and for that reason, they'll never watch it.

Because of my religious upbringing, movies about the supernatural scared the piss out of me. If there was a seance, I had to hide behind the couch and just take occasional peeks at the TV. But it was a very *real* fear because where I come from, you don't mess with seances or ouija boards, and there was a demon around every corner. I liked horror movies *because* they scared me. But it was fun, safe kind of scared. I enjoyed it.

But movies that centered on the supernatural with an emphasis on seances and mediums — or worse, if they involved the devil or devil worship in any way — scared me in a different way, because I thought all that stuff was *real*. I was raised to believe that something like Rosemary Woodhouse getting raped by the devil was a *real possibility*.

Movies like *The Legend of Hell House* and *The Haunting*, which were based on great novels by Richard Matheson and Shirley Jackson, or *Curse of the Demon*, or *The Black Cat*, or *The Seventh Victim*, or *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Exorcist*, *The Omen* — those movies burned themselves into my memory. Even cheesy drive-in fare like *Race with the Devil* or *Brotherhood of Satan* or *The Devil's Rain* messed me up. I felt compelled to watch them because I loved horror movies, but *those* movies were about *real things* that might *get* me! After watching those movies, I had to have a light on in my bedroom at night, but it didn't matter because I couldn't sleep anyway. Having opened myself to Satan by watching one of his movies, I could be possessed by one of his minions at any moment, so I didn't *dare* fall asleep! That made them stand out more vividly than the rest. They were more memorable, they stayed with me and became favorites. Today, of course, I don't believe the same things I did when I was a boy, but I think those movies still work beautifully and I never tire of them.

5. You wrote a lot of your early novels under a pseudonym, are there advantages to writing under a different name do you think? Was it because you weren't sure about your early works?

I first used the pseudonym Joseph Locke when I wrote the novelization of two of the Nightmare on Elm Street movies. But not long after that, I began writing young adult fiction. I was afraid if I used my real name for that, young readers might then go out and find my *other* books, which definitely are *not* for young readers. So I used that name for my young adult novels as well. It had nothing to do with my confidence in the work, it was just a practical way to separate my young adult fiction from my horror fiction aimed at adults.

6. You have done a lot of movie and TV book novelizations, what is the creative process for that like? How much freedom do the producers give you to go inside the character's heads versus writing your own novel?

I know we writers are supposed to be kind of ashamed of that kind of work because it's done primarily to make some money. But I really enjoy writing novelizations and tie-ins. They're fast, easy, and they're a great writing exercise. How much freedom you have varies from one project to the next. All the hard work is already done — the story, the characters. The only thing the writer has to do is adapt the script into a fun, entertaining novel. And I find that to be very enjoyable.

7. I remember the first story I ever read by you called "Pieces" about a guy remembering sexual abuse and parts of his body start to fall off. Do you think the short story medium is more creatively free? In that you have the ability to just show readers a glimpse of a world and then just pull right out, sometimes without explanation.

Short stories are much harder for me to write than novels or novellas. I feel claustrophobic in the short form and I have less confidence when I'm writing. I always feel pressured by the limited space I have to tell my story. That makes me more creative, but it's harder work. It doesn't come as easily as a novel. I can only speak for myself, of course, but for me, the short story doesn't provide more creative freedom, but it forces me to condense my thoughts, to shape my story more tightly and not be as wordy. That last one *especially* is a skill I probably should develop.

8. In your opinion, what are your best novels/short story collections that you are most proud of?

My favorite of all my novels isn't a horror novel. It's a darkly comic thriller called *Sex and Violence in Hollywood*. It was the best writing experience I've ever had and I was proud of the finished product. Right now, it's being developed for the screen by producer Robert Harris. Of my horror novels, I think *Scissors* is my personal favorite simply because it's so ... weird. It doesn't rely on any already established horror mythology, like vampires or werewolves. It's also a story about a father trying to connect with and get to know his son. He thinks the problem is his son, but the problem is with *him*, and it's one he doesn't even know he has. Of my collections, I think *The Girl in the Basement and Other Stories*, although it's small, is my best. It was published in 2004 by Subterranean Press as a limited edition hardcover. The novella *The Girl in the Basement* has since been reprinted alone by E-Reads and is available as a trade paperback and ebook, but it doesn't include the four short stories that originally accompanied it in the Subterranean edition. A close second to that would be *Slivers of Bone*.

9. Do you personally believe in the supernatural? I know you had some negative experiences in your life with religion and in particular the Snedeker family whose alleged experiences inspired the film, "The Haunting in Connecticut". Why do you think people make up paranormal encounters?

The paranormal has always been popular, whatever it's called at any given time — the supernatural, spiritualism, the occult, whatever. And there's a good reason for that, of course. Given the choice between simply ceasing to exist or moving on to another life on some other plane of existence, most people are going to choose the latter pretty quickly. I think that goes for *everybody*. I know *I* would prefer that. I don't believe in it simply because I've seen no reason to believe in it and plenty of reasons not to, but I'm open. That's why people have so much interest in the paranormal, or believe in it so strongly, or *want* to believe in it. Everyone would love to know if there's anything after this life. What I find astonishing is not that people believe, or want to believe, in an afterlife. What I find so astonishing is how many of them honestly seem to think there's a chance that, if the discovery of an afterlife is ever made, it'll be on some goddamned cable TV show hosted by "dudes" and "bros" who have less credibility than a Craigslist personals ad. But that wasn't your question.

People make up paranormal encounters for two primary reasons, I think: money and attention. There may be some who do it out of a kind of misguided wishful thinking, I suppose. But most people do it for those two reasons. Ed and Lorraine Warren, the people I worked with on *In A Dark Place*, are the best example of that. They're certainly the most well known.

First, they were well-known "ghostbusters." Then after the *huge* success of *The Exorcist* in the early '70s, which made Satan an even bigger celebrity than he was before, all the Warrens' ghosts were replaced with sodomizing demons, and they became prominent "demonologists." They gathered a following that had — and still has, even six years after Ed's death, because Lorraine carries on the work — an almost cult-like devotion to them. They had their names on a bunch of books they didn't even write. Some of those books have been made into movies. They've made countless TV appearances over the decades. Their personal appearances were popular on the lucrative lecture circuit. They traveled extensively. At their height, they were probably the best known "paranormal investigators" in the country, maybe in the world. Making up paranormal encounters gave them a good life — *and* the extra perks of being celebrities.

But don't make the mistake of thinking they were true believers who sincerely thought the stories they told really happened or that they honestly believed their interpretation of events was in any way authentic. They were ... performers. Yeah, let's go with that. *Performers*. Their stories were group efforts. Everyone in the group, the Warrens, the family being "investigated," and especially whatever horror writer they hired to write the book for them, pitched in to come up with what Ed called for again and again — a good, scary story that

would work as a book and movie. The families involved were either having real problems that needed *real help*, problems that made them vulnerable to emotional manipulation — something at which Ed and Lorraine *excelled* — or they were like-minded folks who had no qualms about jumping on Ed and Lorraine’s “let’s make up a story” train, or they were some combination of the two. The most disturbing thing is the fact that *children* get roped into this. I watched it happen. What they and others like them do is deliberately deceptive. It’s a scam that exploits the hope that maybe there’s something after this life. And it’s extremely common, as common as dirt. As common as cable TV “reality” shows about the paranormal.

10. What projects are you working on right now?

I’m working on a couple of thrillers, doing some for-hire work and trying to stay afloat in this nightmare of an economy. I’m testing the self-publishing waters. I’ve published a short story, “The Man in the Palace Theater,” for Kindle and Nook, and my novella *Serpent Girl* will be available very soon, as well. And I’m always plugging the books. I have a website, many of my books are available from E-Reads, and I’m blogging more than ever before, but still not with the regularity I’m shooting for.

Website:

<http://www.raygartononline.com>

E-Reads:

<http://ereads.com/ecms/authurname/Ray-Garton>

Blog:

<http://www.preposteroustwaddlecock.blogspot.com>

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/ray.garton.3>

Twitter:

<https://twitter.com/RayGarton>

Ray Garton is the author of over 60 novels, novellas, short story collections, movie novelizations and TV tie-ins. His 1987 erotic vampire novel, *Live Girls*, called “artful” by the *New York Times*, was published in several different languages and nominated for the Bram Stoker Award. In 2006, he received the Grand Master of Horror Award at the World Horror Convention. In addition to horror fiction, he has written a number of thrillers and crime novels, and in the 1990s, he wrote several young adult horror novels and thrillers under the name Joseph Locke. His comedy-thriller *Sex and Violence in Hollywood*, a novel originally published in 2001, is currently being developed as a motion picture. E-Reads has made many of his titles available as trade paperbacks and ebooks, including his two most recent novels, *Trailer Park Noir*, a dark, gritty story of sex and murder in a small town trailer park, and *Meds*, a thriller with deadly side effects.



<http://ladychristina.deviantart.com/>

ATABEY

BY BRYAN HOWIE

1

The narrow streets surprise me. Worn cobblestone with buildings clustered so close, and the small tree shoots breaking through both. Brightly colored litter lines the the sidewalks, floating in the hot breezes from above or lifted by the cooling current from the sea. The ocean provides the only respite from the heat. This earth sweats heat. There is nothing to be done about it. Tropical rains don't even lower the temperature, but only thicken the air into a warm drink. You could drown just inhaling the misty wind.

Reds and yellows brighten every person. Clothing is more vibrant here. The softness of pale colors could never survive here, drowned out in the panoply. The men walk with hard steps, challenging like a bull stomping a hoof. The women sway, walking without touching their heels to the ground. Toe walking, their ass cheeks lift with each step, their calves stretch taut, their thighs quiver.

And yet, their breasts stay still. They do not rock from side to side. It is all in the hips.

Even with all this, the heat of the island, the bright trash, the beautiful women and dangerous men, I notice you. First it is the back of my ears. A tickle like a cool breath down my neck. I try to keep myself calm, but I know you are there before I see you. I pull my broad-brimmed hat down on my head, shading my pale skin from the unforgiving sun, peeking over my shoulder as I do. And there you slip back, hiding in the half shadow of an alleyway.

Without slowing, I move forward through the crowd, holding my briefcase out in front of me to part the stream of people, searching my mind for your name. I know that face like an echo of a voice given physical form. No name comes to mind. No event alights my memory. The soft curve of your cheeks, the darker upper lip and the pink lower lip that begs to be sucked on. Eyes soft and sharp at once, capable of creating or destroying with a glance. Ears so delicate, curved like the folds of a lily, small and always open.

The heat has gotten to me, I think. The water I carry in my other hand is warmed by the sun, hot on

my tongue, but soothing as it wets my lips and throat. Earlier in the day, I met an old woman who refilled my bottle from a well that was older than her parents, she said. The water tastes of iron, copper, and dirt.

The ghost of your image is standing right in front of me, blocking out the tourists on their way to the same beach I am headed for. Hawkers call out their wares. For a moment, I am lost in your image and the taste of earth in liquid form.

The throng of people pulls me left and right, a large hotel in the distance the destination. Once the greatest mansion on the island, the hotel has replaced the old world with capitalism. Once, the beach was soaked in the blood of any who trespassed. Before that, a battle for freedom was fought on its shore. Before that, the fertility ceremonies were held upon the soft sands. Now, it costs 30 dollars to touch your feet to the beach and play in the surf.

The old lady had said that the earth called for blood. It's the blood I came for. The history. The story.

I step into the hotel and am instantly cooled. My sweat freezes on me. The extravagance of the single step from the outside world into the comfort of progress shocks me. My head tilts, and again in my periphery vision I see you. What are you?

A con. That's what I think. Nobody so beautiful should be alone. Nobody so sweet and tender could make it through the town unmolested. Yet there you are, hiding in shadows, stepping out to hide behind taller men and women, walking with such unassuming innocence that even the most vicious man would be too enthralled to move against you. And you smile, white teeth shining out from those dark lips, your eyes squinting in joy, as you see that I know you are there.

And you are gone just as quickly, swallowed up by a still moving crowd.

The thoughts of you are not easy to allow to slip out of my mind, I hold your face in my eyes for as long as I can. Your neck is strong and thin. Your arms have tightly wound tone beneath the illusion of softness. Breasts small and high. You wear a red dress that winds around your body like the curves of your body wind around my mind. Soft red lined in darker crimson. Your hair is wavy and black, it sweeps up and falls down like a wave cresting around your face.

Through the hotel lobby to the bar, I sit down and order a brown ale. My body is weak from heat. My white shirt clings to my chest and my pink nipples shine through. Too tired to be embarrassed, I tilt the drink back and let the sweet liquid cool me from the inside. I order 2 more and head to an empty corner booth to pull out my day's work and start compiling the research which brought me to the island in the first place.

The woman in the hut had been here for longer than she could count. I write down the signs she said

had hearkened her birth. The lunar eclipse, a year of heavy rain and flooding. When she was 10, she said, the earth called for blood. That was the beginning of the sacrifices of any trespassers on the beach. She claimed to be 70 when the last blood spilled onto the beach. That puts her age around 100. Such a sweet old lady, but hardly that old. Her nephew translated for me, as I had taken notes. I know she said things that he didn't repeat. But, I have a start and... something more. What is it?

Another beer is what I have. I read the history text. The coup, the religious uprising, the stories of witches and sorcery. 60 years apart. 120 years apart. I'm missing some of the events, I'm sure. The superstitions and the forgotten Gods and Goddesses. Fascinating to be this close to where it happened, but still I'm 30 years too late for the last one, which kept the beach red with blood for months. It took the close passing of a hurricane to wash away the stains. The day slips away as I read and write and drink and piece together a story that hasn't been told completely.

2

I wake up drunk, my papers pushed to the side, my beers toppled over empty. The bar is dark, but the bartender stands in front of the liquor cabinet and polishes a glass before setting it beneath the bar. A few couples sit in booths, watching the ocean and nuzzling in the low light. Hands slip beneath dresses in the darkness, stroking palms across the men's laps. Light kisses turn deep and sensuous.

I pull out my briefcase and sweep everything in without organizing it first. The bottles, six still on the table, swim in my vision. Something I've forgotten, I think. How many beers did they take away if they left six empties here? A tickle at the back of my neck, at the base of my skull. I can feel the hangover like a distant roll of thunder across the stormy ocean, a threat whose time hasn't come yet. My fingers pulse with my heartbeat and my legs shake when I stand up.

"What do I owe?" I say as I stumble to the bartender. "Must be six there, three before."

"Twelve beers, dude," the bartender says. His accent is thick, but he says 'dude' like a Californian. We only export bad habits, I think, but I catch the pretentiousness of such a thought and try to be less of an old prick.

"Twelve?" I repeat. "Shit. I thought... I dreamed about something important. It was the earth but--"

"You staying at the hotel," the bartender interrupts me. I nod to him. "Hotel discount then. 48 bucks."

"God that's good," I say. "I'd drink all night at that price."

"You did," he says. He won't look me in the face, and I don't blame him. A man about to enter the

throws of a great hangover is a sight to be avoided.

I pull out a fifty and a twenty. I give them to him. He pockets the fifty and puts the twenty in the register. I laugh and tell him to have a good night.

“Don’t dream too hard,” he says.

“No, I won’t,” I walk away thinking. But, wait. He didn’t say dream. He said work. I heard him say work. Don’t work too hard. I keep shaking my head and try to get the buzzing out of my eyes and the spots out of my ears as I get to the elevator.

My room is the cheapest they have, but this is not a cheap hotel. The olive green silk sheets already pulled open for entry. A large flat screen TV and speakers that surround the room. I throw my briefcase on the couch and it gives into the weight with a softness that makes me want to lay down on it right away. But I can’t sleep yet. The sweat from the day tightens my skin; I feel claustrophobic in my own flesh.

I grab a pint of expensive whiskey from the mini-bar. I take a pill, something I got earlier in the day from the old medicine woman who called it a ‘good sleep time pill’, which I was told by her nephew was actually a ball of opium. The whiskey and the pill will push me past any hangover and tomorrow I can start the second part of my investigation into the blood spilled on this island.

I almost remember it, then. Something I had forgotten again. Something about the dream. Damn it. I wash down the pill, savor the burn of the good whiskey and the smokey sweetness of its bite as my stomach warms. I begin taking off my clothing as I work my way through the bottle and to the bathroom.

My feet are brown from the dirt in the air, my face is ruddy and burnt, my beard has bleached into a brighter shade of red than it’s ever been. My eyes, blue with specks of green, are surrounded by weary small red capillaries.

I turn on the shower and the heat of it is instant. In the cooled room, the steam thickens and swirls around me. It is the same as the air felt outside earlier today. In the mirror, I stand naked, head tilted back as I drain the whiskey bottle and watch the myself. Stomach flat, chest slightly toned. My shoulders are large and thick. Curly brown hair leads the way down my chest and spreads into a thicker forest above my penis. My cock is shy, only a small amount of shaft and the light purple head visible. The last of the whiskey hits my mouth and I lick at it, coating my tongue with the burning liquid.

In the shower, the water washes away more than just the grime of a hot, sticky day. The pills and booze kick in while the warmth covers me in a moist blanket, gently scrubbing me from the inside out. I stand in one place, my hands up around the shower head, my face engulfed in the flow. My eyes closed and I can see the

color of your skin, darker than dark honey, the reflection of a loving sun lighting you up. I see that red dress swish around your hips as you skip backward into an alley.

My arms are numb and strong, filled with hot blood. My dick is hard, larger than it has ever been before, pushing the limits of my skin as the head turns a dark purple. Every drop of water that hits my erection is like a small orgasm. Drunk, high, exhausted, heat stroked, and hallucinating.

I feel you with me in the room before I hear you. Your scent is different than I imagined. Jasmine and peppery, a thick smell that overwhelms me, enters me. You pull the shower curtain aside and I fall back away from you.

Nothing about life has ever been as honest as this moment. I can't see you with my eyes open, but I watch as you step lightly over the shower ledge and into the warm water. Thighs muscled firm: runners legs, dark, smooth, and beautiful. Your hair falls down in the cascading spray of the shower, spreading down to your shoulders, farther down to reach your high breasts. Nipples dark and hard surrounded by an even darker areolae. You reach to my face with the hands of someone who has tilled the earth, palms pink and fresh as a child's, yet soft as they pull my face down to your breast.

My tongue swirls around your tit, you pull me in closer, aiming my lips toward your nipple. My hands reach out for purchase on the slick walls, but you grab my right hand and put it on your ass. Steel muscle bunched beneath the thinnest layer of softness, your ass lifts while a small moan escapes your mouth. You release my hand and reach down my chest.

Fingers tracing down the line of my hairy chest, my body bent over to your breast and to cup your ass, you reach down to my cock and it jumps away from your grasp with such fierceness that it slaps me in the stomach. Your ass tightens as you reach forward and grab my dick, your fingers pulling the foreskin forward, sure to not let my cock escape you again.

I roll my tongue around your nipple as I bite down lightly. The water begins to grow colder as our bodies grow warmer. I let go of the wall and hold onto your body as I straighten up to look into your stygian cinnamon eyes. The hand on your ass slides into the crack and brushes your asshole as I reach down from behind for your pussy.

"Who are you?" I ask. Your eyes are dark brown, lit from some setting sun in an unknown land. I begin to lose myself inside of them even as my finger slips between the soft pedals of your pussy and into a slick flower.

I lose my balance and reach back for the wall, but my hand tightens instead around the balcony railing.

The shower is only warm now, not hot. The sky above us is dark and blue, clouded and the moon peaks through the cracks to spy us. Your eyes, still so enticing, distract me from the thought of space or time. Your lips part, the pinkness of your bottom lip begs me to kiss it. You say something to me in a language I don't understand and I nod in agreement as our lips meet.

Your tongue writhes inside my mouth, tasting me, testing me. My tongue traces your lips while you lift your leg up and I slip a finger into you. Rocking back with your hips, my fingers slide into you and rocking forward the head of my dick slips up your wet slit to rub against your clitoris. My fingers explore your wetness when you push back against them, and then slip out to rub your soft lips as you move forward to slide my now wet, throbbing cock head against your hardening clit.

You push your self against my dick as you change your grip and grab me by the shaft and balls, pulling me toward your wet pussy. My dick follows my fingers to your yielding opening. The head of my cock pushes my fingers out of the tightness of your private garden.

You stop with only the tip of me inside you. My fingers fall back into the crescent of your ass, a finger toying with your asshole, circling it with the wetness of your pussy. Your tongue flicks inside my mouth, hard and searching. Your eyes are locked onto mine, and I couldn't look away even if I wanted to. I need to see what you see.

You grab my head with both hands, push your hips against me, pull my cock into your pussy, and lean back. I have no grasp and fall forward into you. I try to reach out to break our fall, and instead of the hard concrete of the balcony, my hands slip through the cool sands of the beach below. My hands slide out to the sides, and I slam myself into you deeply. Sand on my knees, sand on my elbows; sand wet with a soft warm rain.

Your yoni grips me with its inner, secret muscles, milking at my cock with contractions as you say something into my ear. You whisper it, say it, yell it, and the sound of crashing water covers the details of your screams in some language I don't understand at all. The mist of the ocean whips over our bodies, the smell of salt and of your sweat mingle sweet and harsh. A magical combination of scents. My hands trace your face as I push harder into you. Your hips rise to meet each thrust. You are open and wet and even through the crushing of our bodies, I feel the hard, dark pearl of your clitoris pulsing against me.

The tide rushes over me, turning us over, and you emerge on top of me. Your hands push against my chest and your body arches back in triumph as the vibrations of your vaginal walls begin to pull the last of my resistance from me. You lift your hips once, twice, three times, slamming back down onto me with a rising

scream in your voice and my lips are open and sound is escaping from my throat but I can't recognize what those sounds are.

A flow of lava, wet and hot, erupts from your pussy, soaking me with thick lubrication. You rock back on my cock, pushing it to the breaking point. Your eyes on mine, as you watch for the moment of my release. I start to say something, but I don't have any words to say. You jump off me, crouching down next to me, and grab my cock and begin sliding your hand up and down the shaft. My testicles tighten, my pelvic muscles spasm, and the first bit of cum flies out of my cock and lands on the beach. Your eyes widen, wild and ecstatic, you stroke me again and more spurts of white liquid arch into the air to land on the sand. You angle my cock to the side and continue the slick sliding of your hands as I empty myself on the beach.

My body gives one last spasm, but nothing more comes from me. You relax your grip and I spread out in the wet sand. You push your hands into the sand, washing myself from you in the gritty beach. Your body is sheltered warmth, curling against me as I drift away. Our eyes are still locked, but my eyelids are too heavy to continue. You, awake and bright, the moon lighting you from the inside out. Soft brown, dark honey colored eyes. You whisper something in my ear.

3

I awake in the bed, the silk sheets tussled and wet with sweat and my wet body. I must have fallen asleep in the shower, I think. I must have crawled in here. I don't remember any of it.

I think about the night. About the dream. About you. That language, lost to the dreams. Phrases stuck in my ears. Nothing but syllables that can never mean full words. Something sweet and ancient and inside me.

"Good sleep time," I chuckle to myself as I roll over in the damp sheets. "No shit, old lady. Great time sleep."

My body is sore, tight and loose at the same time, as if I've run all day. Out of shape, I think. I need to get in better shape. This island takes a lot out of a man, I think. The ceiling is golden white, a strange color for a ceiling.

My eyes fall on a picture above me on the wall. An icon of an old island religion. A young, black girl with dark amber eyes, the body of an athlete. Probably the body of a hunter in her time of worship. Her arms cradle her belly, swollen pregnant with the earth and sky and oceans. And then the words come back to me. Not the lost language, but those last words as I saw your eyes so clearly in the moonlight. "The earth wants no more blood. The earth wants life now."



<http://frozen-scumbag.deviantart.com/>

7 QUESTIONS WITH A PUBLISHED WRITER KATHE KOJA



Daniel Gonzales: I have long been a fan of your work. You seem to take chances that most other artists don't. One of your first books was *Cipher*, a book that literally is about a hole in the floor of an abandoned warehouse, yet everything that the characters stick in comes out strangely rearranged. It's such a strange novel, how did that idea come about?

Kathe Koja: Everything I write begins as an image, and *CIPHER*'s image was of Nicholas, who himself seems to be such a cipher, yet as the story continues, we see him as the lynchpin, the driver of everything that happens: those who come into contact with him, in relation to the Funhole, are forced to change, or to flee.

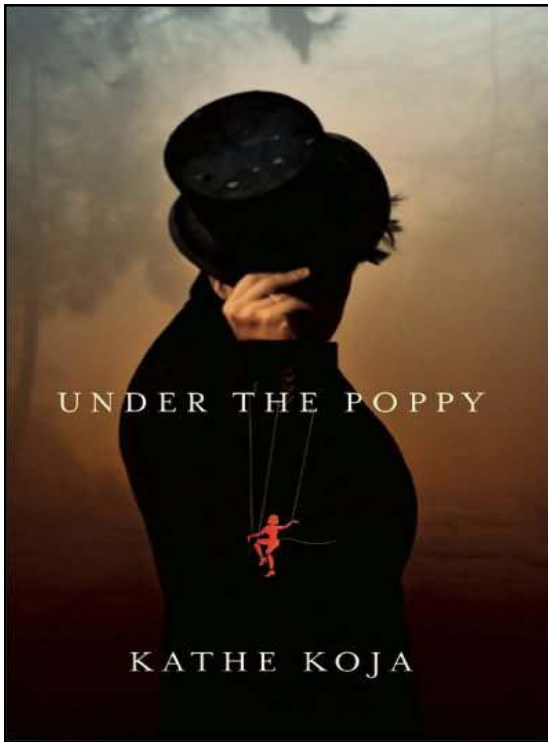
Where the concept of the funhole itself begins ... if ever an idea floated out of the id, that was it.

DG: With *Skin*, *Strange Angels* and *Bad Brains*, you seem to have a fascination with artists and the artistic process. Your early novels flow in this almost stream of consciousness style which is very polarizing to readers, it seems people either love your stuff or hate it. Do you believe good writing should be that way?

KK: I believe my writing, when it's good, is that way; I can't speak to anyone else's style or process. I know that writing I love, like Anthony Burgess' or Emily Dickinson's, takes full advantage of the force and wild swerves and delicacy that the English language offers. I want prose that does more than tells me the story, I want it to be part of the experience of reading (and writing).

DG: You have a very loyal fan base for those who love your work while Publishers Weekly on Amazon puts up some pretty vicious reviews of your work. How do you deal with bad reviews of your work and keep a thick skin?

KK: What a writer needs is the discernment that allows him or her to glean whatever is useful from any review - if anything therein is useful - and put it, then, to use.



And once the work is in the world, people are free to read and comment as they see fit, readers, reviewers, whoever. I'm not bothered by extreme reactions to my work; I prefer them.

DG: Back to your fascination with writing about artists and photographers and painters and creative types. Do you think creative people are more interesting to write about than say average Joe call center worker?

KK: No. But they are my subject, and have been, no matter what genre I'm writing in, since my first stories and novels. Why this is so is one of those subconscious choices, or non-choices, that I don't question; I don't lift the hood, I just drive the car.

DG: One book reviewer calls you the 'Edgar Allan Poe of the 21st Century', you have this great seductive style of writing that I find fascinating. I am a big believer in the link between sex and death, creativity and madness, pain and pleasure. Your book 'Kink' and various stories from 'Extremities' as well as your new novel 'Under

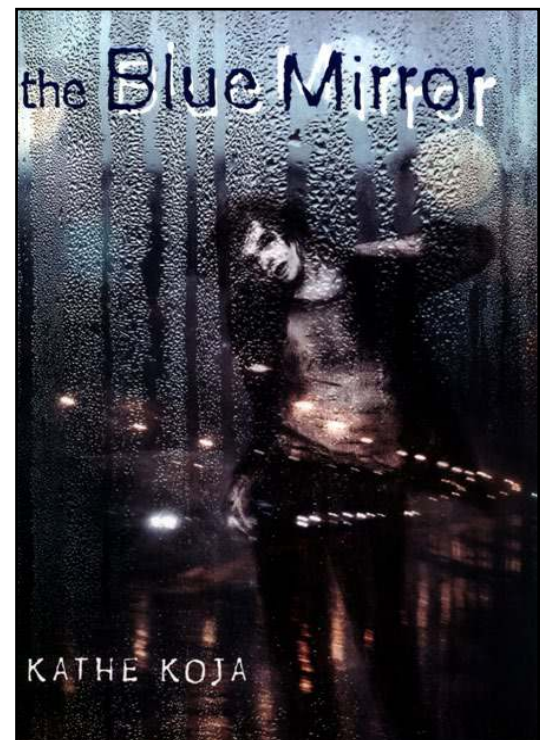
the Poppy' seem to deal with sexuality in so many different forms and fetishes. Do you think sexuality and death are the basis of good subversive horror?

KK: Sexuality and death are basic to human life, and central to human thought and emotion. And we see a person very clearly when s/he is very frightened or very desirous - panic sends us trampling over grandmas, love sees us ransacking our hearts to find more to offer and give the beloved one. It's very interesting, for a writer, to observe and depict human beings in these extreme and amazing states.

DG: What's funny is you have written some very dark and disturbing stuff, I seem to remember a splatterpunk story about a boy with a decapitated talking dog's head, not to mention some of the extremely and beautifully grotesque stories in your 'Extremities' collection. So it was strange to learn a few years back that you write young adult novels too. How did that come about?

KK: My agent, Christopher Schelling, encouraged me to write a YA novel expanding my short story "Stray Dog," which became the novel STRAYDOG. I found I had an affinity for the genre and a whole lot of fun in the writing, so I stayed for seven more books. I'll gladly do more in the future if the right story surfaces ... There are few readers more passionate or demanding than teenagers and I like that attitude a lot.

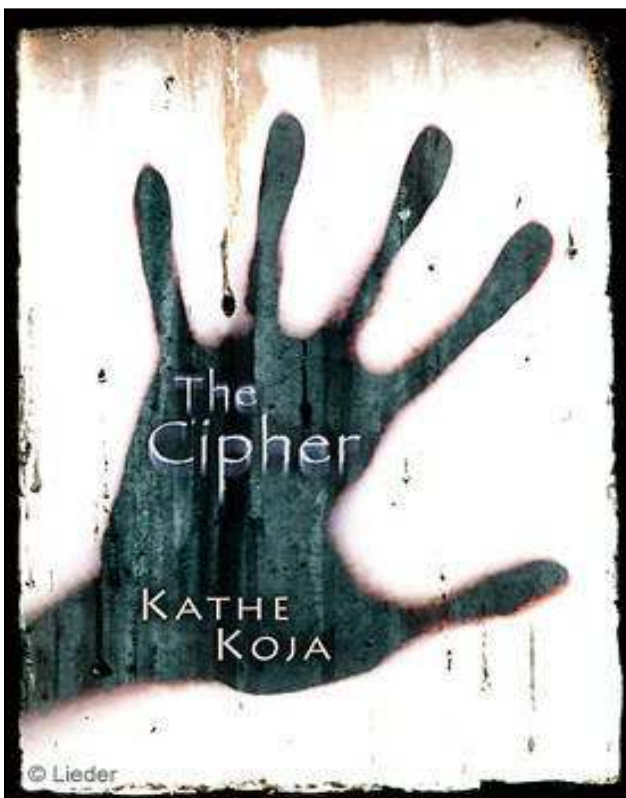
DG: What's great though even about your teenage novels is that you don't have to use profanity or extreme violence to get your point across. The surreal imagery is enough such as in 'The Blue Mirror' where you tackle the concept of the demon lover which has a rich literary history. Plus there is no simple morality in your young adult novels. You don't pander to the lowest common denominator like some YA writers do *cough* Stephanie Meyer. Your characters are complex. So what made you decide to go back and write an adult novel after so many years in the YA realm and do



you plan to do so in the future?

DG: UNDER THE POPPY is my first venture into historical fiction, and with that book I did as I always do - followed an image and a story that intrigued me: a man on a road with a louche and dangerous puppet troupe -- and started writing. And UNDER THE POPPY now has a sequel, THE MERCURY WALTZ, coming out in spring 2013, and has also found a home onstage: I've directed and produced a series of immersive theatrical events based on the story, in sites ranging from a gritty industrial complex to the Detroit Institute of Arts, and am in discussions with several groups about taking the story on the road. As Tony Kushner has written, "What you love will take you where you never dreamed you'd go," and that's been true over and over again in my writing life. And it's an extremely fun way to work, as well.

And Now, an excerpt from Kathe Koja's e-novel, the CIPHER, now available on Amazon.



THE CIPHER by Kathe Koja, excerpt from chapter 1
Roadswell Editions 2012

<http://kathekoja.com/blog> <http://www.roadswell.com/>

Nakota, who saw it first: long spider legs drawn up beneath her ugly skirt, wise mouth pursed into nothing like a smile. Sitting in my dreary third-floor flat, on a dreary thrift shop chair, the window light behind her dull and gray as dirty fur and she alive, giving off her dark continuous sparks.

Around us the remains of this day's argument, squashed beer cans, stolen bar ashtray sloped full. "You know it," she said, "the black-hole thing, right? In space? Big dark butthole," and she laughed, showing those tiny teeth, fox teeth, not

white and not ivory yellow either like most people's, almost bluish as if with some undreamed-of decay beneath them. Nakota would rot differently from other people; she would be the first to admit it.

She lit a cigarette. She was the only one of my friends who still smoked, without defiance or a guilty flourish, smoked like she breathed but not as often. Black cigarettes, and sweetened mineral water. "So. You gonna touch it today?"

“No.”

Another unsmile. “Wiener.” I shrugged. “Not really.” “Nicholas Wiener.”

So I didn’t answer her. Back to the kitchen. Get your own mineral water. The beer was almost too cold, it hurt going down. When I came back to the living room, what passed for it—big windows, small floor space, couch, bed and bad chair—she smiled at me, the real thing this time. Sometimes I thought I was the only one who ever saw that she was beautiful, who ever had. God knows there wasn’t much, but I had eyes for it all.

“Let’s go look at it,” she said.

The one argument there was no resisting. Quietly, we had learned to do it quietly, down the stairs, turn right on the first landing (second floor to you), past the new graffiti that advised LEESA IS A HORE (no phone number, naturally; thanks a lot assholes) and the unhealthy patina of aging slurs, down the hall to what seemed, might be, some sort of storage room.

Detergent bottles, tools, when you opened the door, jumble of crap on the floor, and beyond that a place, a space, the dust around it pale and easily dispersed.

Behold the Funhole.

“Shit,” Nakota said, as she always did, her prayer of wonder. She knelt, bending low and supporting herself on straight-stiff arms, closer than I ever did, staring at it. Into it. It was as if she could kneel there all day, painful position but you knew she didn’t feel it, looking and looking. I took my spot, a little behind her, to the left, my own prayer silence: what to say before the unspeakable?

Black. Not darkness, not the absence of light but living black. Maybe a foot in diameter, maybe a little more. Pure black and the sense of pulsation, especially when you looked at it too closely, the sense of something not living but alive, not even something but some—process. Rabbit hole, some strange motherfucking wonderland, you bet. Get somebody named Alice, tie a string to her... We’d discussed it all, would discuss it again, probably tonight, and Nakota would sit as she always did, straight-backed as a priestess, me getting ripped and ripping into poetry, writing shit that was worse than unreadable in the morning, when I would wake—more properly afternoon, and she long gone, off to her job, unsmiling barmaid at Club 22 and me late again for the video store. She might not come again for days, or a day, one day maybe never. I knew: friends, yeah, but it was the Funhole she wanted. You can know something and never think about it, if you’re any good at it. Me, now, I’ve been avoiding so much for so long that the real trick becomes thinking straight.

Beside me, her whisper: “Look at it.”

I sometimes thought it had a smell, that negative place; we'd made the expected nervous fart jokes, the name itself—well, you can guess. But there was some kind of smell, not bad, not even remotely identifiable, but there, oh my yes. I would know that smell forever, know it in the dark (ho-ho) from a city block away. I couldn't forget something that weird.

For the millionth time: "Wouldn't it be wild to go down there?"

And me, on cue and by rote, "Yeah. But we're not."

Its edges were downhill and smooth. They asked for touch. Not me, said the little red hen, the little chicken, uh-uh. Smell rising around me, it did that sometimes, Nakota insisted she could almost catch the scent at its strongest (which meant nothing, she was a nose-drop addict, she couldn't smell her own shit which she claimed didn't stink anyway) rising humid as a steam cloud but who knew from what fluid, what wetness, its humidity had birth? A moist center? Things, inside? That was Nakota's guess, but I knew, absolutely knew that it was the Funhole itself, the black fact of it, sending up that tangible liquidy smell.

How long, tonight? An hour? Twenty minutes? No telling till we got back to my flat, checked the clock; it was time to do that. Rising, more reluctant, her hair in the dusty half-dark as black as the Funhole, short chop swinging around those fierce cheekbones, elbows bending as she sat straight and then stood; my knees cracked, we both jumped, then smiled on a breath, got out.

Up the stairs, down my hall. "You coming in?"

Stopping before we reached my door, her headshake. "No."

"Got your smokes?"

She patted her skirt pocket, she liked those stupid ugly resale-shop skirts, fake fifties poodle skirts with poodles that she restitched into gargoyles, fanged lizards worthy of the most hideous touristy fake kimonos. That, and T-shirts of bands so obscure even I'd never heard of them. God. Half the time she looked like a bag of rags someone'd left out for the Salvation Army. Or the garbage man.

"How 'bout your nose drops?" You know, you should shut up, I advised myself, but not fast enough to miss her scorn: "My mother's dead, thanks, I look after myself now." Then a grave glance, the closest she came to kindly. "I'll see you," she said, squeezed my elbow—her signature good-bye—and left, that graceful trudge, puke-colored skirt swinging around thin hips. What, me disappointed?

I used to know those hips, yeah, felt the pointy midge of those bones, bony back, small small tits, I once compared them to SuperBalls and she laughed through her fury; she couldn't help it, she always did like my jokes. The last time we'd made love, measure it in years, it had been

at my drunken insistence and bad, oh, was it bad? It was so bad that halfway into it, and her, I knew in sudden bright horror that she was actually being nice to me. This was so disorienting that I crawled off her, away, into the bathroom where I sat hunched among the towels heaped wet and dirty on the wet and dirty floor, close by the toilet, shaking my head. She appeared, naked and thin as a ruler, stood in the diffused light of the bedroom and observed that she had never actually made a man sick before. I think it was her smile, all teeth, that made me finally barf.

But: that cold grin, Nakota, I wanted her still, always, in the dreamy way you want to dive the Marianas trench, or walk in space: you know you never will, so it's okay to moon over it. Like mooning over the Funhole, only not quite. Long ago she had made it plain that those days were over, her deliberate graft of a scab over the ridiculous wound of my love, or something equally stupid but just as painful; a romantic, me, in my own sick wistful way. I can take a hint, but I can't live with it.

Inside I cranked shut the windows I'd opened for her cigarette stink, leaving the one by the couchbed open; I'd always liked night air, especially when I was a kid and was told it was bad for me. Shut that window! You'll get pneumonia! Very cool outside tonight, maybe even kissing forty; stupid Nakota, no jacket. You'll get pneumonia.

Hunger headache, in the mirror my sallow face pale. Okay, what's to eat. I hated to shop, it all turned into shit eventually anyway, so as a result there was usually very little to eat and none of it very good. Or fresh, but I was inured to mold, I could eat anything and keep it down. Beer kills the germs, I told people. Tonight it was cracker-and-peanut-butter sandwiches, the peanut butter cheap and thick, the consistency, I told myself as the crackers broke and crumbled, of actual shit. Though of course I had never eaten any, not that I remembered, and that's the sort of thing you would remember, isn't it? What would happen if you stuck food down the Funhole?

"God, stop it," mumbling aloud around a mouthful of sludge like some derelict in the park, shut up, shut up, drink some beer, read the paper. Ann Landers, my boyfriend wants to secrete stuff in my root cellar, I'm only eleven so what the hell? CITY FUNDS NEW SEWAGE PLANT.

Imagine that. Two new movies opening, one about sex and one not. Won't see either, I get enough movies at work. Video Hut, Assistant Manager speaking, may I help you? The screens going every open hour of the day, pushing this movie, that movie, trailer after trailer until we can all, even the dumbest of us, recite them word for word. Once in despair I tried to melt my Video Hut name badge in the microwave: stylized red popcorn box, kernels round as breasts popping voluptuously free above my misspelled name, the whole lurid thing nearly three inches wide. Wouldn't melt, either. I don't know what it did to the microwave.

I took a beer to bed with me, along with a new old copy of Wise Blood. Flannery O'Connor, God I love her. She died before I was born. I have everything she's ever written. That night, knees up under the fraying red quilt, I didn't read so much as flip, skipping around to my

favorite parts, I could recite them but at least they were worth recitation. I was feeling okay from the beer, halfway reading and halfway thinking of Nakota, flabby little halfway erection, cool night air turning cold on my cheek. Was the air from the Funhole cool, too, if you put your face by it? Directly above it, say? nice and close? Would there be a sensation of vacuum? suction, gentle pull like a lover's tug to bed?

"Stop it," alarmed, pulling myself upright, scared, yeah, wouldn't anyone be? No. Nakota wouldn't. She'd go like a zombie, sleepwalking down into the lip, so soft, opened like a kiss, black kiss to suck you down, suck you off, yeah stupid tentpole dick and where are you going, you fucking dummy? I was shaking, I put everything down, got up fast and turned on the stereo, loud, rude-boy reggae. I did not like this, I did not like any of this at all, do they call it a siren song because it cuts through everything else?

Beer. Beer cures everything, maybe even this.

Standing at the refrigerator, oblivious of its stored-cooler scent, can burning cold into my hand, I do not want to go in there, in the dark, I don't even want to think about seeing the, seeing it, drink, drink and fall asleep, and I did.



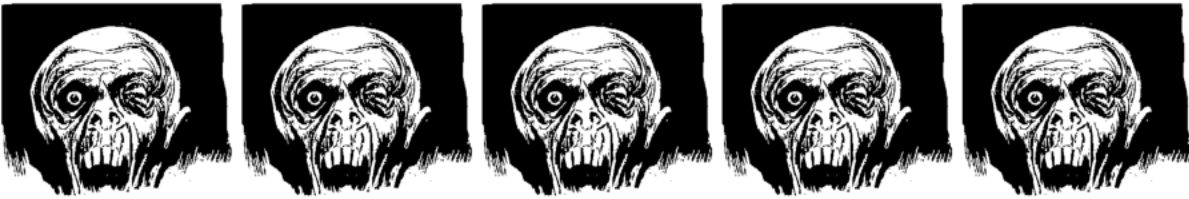




L4DMAPS.COM



<http://addict-se.deviantart.com>



WELCOME TO THE SLENDERVERSE!



Games Based on the Slender Man Mythos-Reviews by Courtney Alsop

Slenderman/Slender Man

These games use the player's paranoia to their advantage. They are popular Let's Plays on Youtube because of their qualities as a party game-it is much more fun to play with another person. You have an extra set of eyes ("There's Slendy! Run!" "No, that's a tree." Fuzzy screen, followed by death) and you get the hyperbole reactions when you unexpectedly run into the tall man with no face. These games are also short. However, it adds to the gaming experience when playing with a friend. Yes, we could all play Call of Duty or Halo together until our brains liquefy. But what about those of us who like to be scared and who like to make our friends afraid of the dark so we can laugh at them?

Slenderman - the Game

<http://www.greenmeteorteam.com/slenderman.html>

While this game is not the most graphically appealing, knowing that it was made in three weeks is impressive. In this story you start at your car and wonder into a house. You enter and see the remnants of a birthday party...and Slenderman, accompanied by lesser enemies with masks. These masked men will attack you, but you can fight back. Additionally, you have unlimited stamina to run with. The game has you running around, gathering tapes, placing them in the VCR, and following the clues. When you pick up the compass, you just have to follow it to your next objective. Finally you will get a gun. But is it enough to kill the mysterious Slenderman who is now following you relentlessly? You follow your compass, running through the woods and peeking around every corner of the house. The screen is filled with static, your heart pounds with anticipation...

This game is very forgiving. If you die, you are sent back outside to your broken car and your progress remains. If you were holding an item, you will find it where you perished. If you were holding the gun and ran out of bullets, you will find that your ammunition has magically replenished itself. This makes the game a little too easy and vanilla, but the game becomes something you can complete in 10-15 minutes without becoming so frustrated that you stop playing and never finish the game. As long as you are not a graphics snob, this game is highly enjoyable.

Slender: The Eight Pages

<http://www.parsecproductions.net/slender/>

This is considered the more popular game of the Slenderman variety. In this story you begin in the woods with a flashlight that has a limited battery and you can run, though not for an unlimited amount of time. In these woods are various landmarks, memos, and Slender Man. The objective of this game is to collect all eight memos regarding the black-suited menace before he captures you and makes you his next victim. You will be captured if Slender Man gets too close or if you stare at him for too long.

This game is excellent for making you paranoid. You know that if you keep your flashlight on you will deplete your battery and you will be in the dark. Without the flashlight on you can look at Slender Man longer without being captured, but you will also be easier to catch and it is nearly impossible to navigate without the light. If you run for too long, you will deplete your stamina and be unable to run away if Slender Man appears in front of you. Yet you cannot have a leisurely stroll either, as the longer you stay in the game the more aggressively you will be pursued. Unfortunately, you will probably spend most of your time hopelessly lost in the woods as you are forced to constantly sprint in different directions when you encounter your tracker.

This game is less forgiving than *Slenderman- The Game*. If Slender Man catches you, you start from the beginning with zero progress. There is no way to fight back either; the only option you have is to look away, turn another direction, and run. Frustration can boil high in this game as it sometimes runs on sheer luck alone. Recently the game had a number of updates, including the subtitle “to differentiate it from future versions.” This is fantastic news as we can hope to see more content in the future.

Slenderman's Shadow

<http://www.slendermansshadow.com/>

This game consists of maps (four at the time of writing) and it is based off of Parsec Productions' *Slender: The Eight Pages*. The gameplay elements are the same: you must collect memos and momentos to complete the stage. Staring at Slenderman will drain your sanity and will eventually kill you. Unlike the previous games, sprinting is not encouraged. Sprinting decreases your maximum stamina so it is best to walk and only run when you are in danger. This gives the games some variety as you must force yourself to keep your pinky off the shift key when you feel scared. As you are playing these you are likely to ask yourself, *Do I really want to look behind me?* In these maps will you discover donator photos and graffiti-a great reward and incentive for raising funds for the new maps.

Sanatorium

This level has a basement vibe that will make you reconsider going into your unfinished basement at night if not absolutely necessary. The objective, like in *Slender: The Eight Pages*, is to collect eight pages. This is the first map of the project, and while it does not add anything new to the game play, it still delivers the scares and paranoia that we were craving after its predecessor was released.

Hospice

In this installment you must collect 16 lines of a poem (8 pages) about Slenderman. The atmosphere of this map is better than Sanatorium's, as there are tiled walls, bath tubs, and tables with restraints. The use of the poem is imaginative and while the objective is still to collect pages, the messages on the pages are more meaningful.

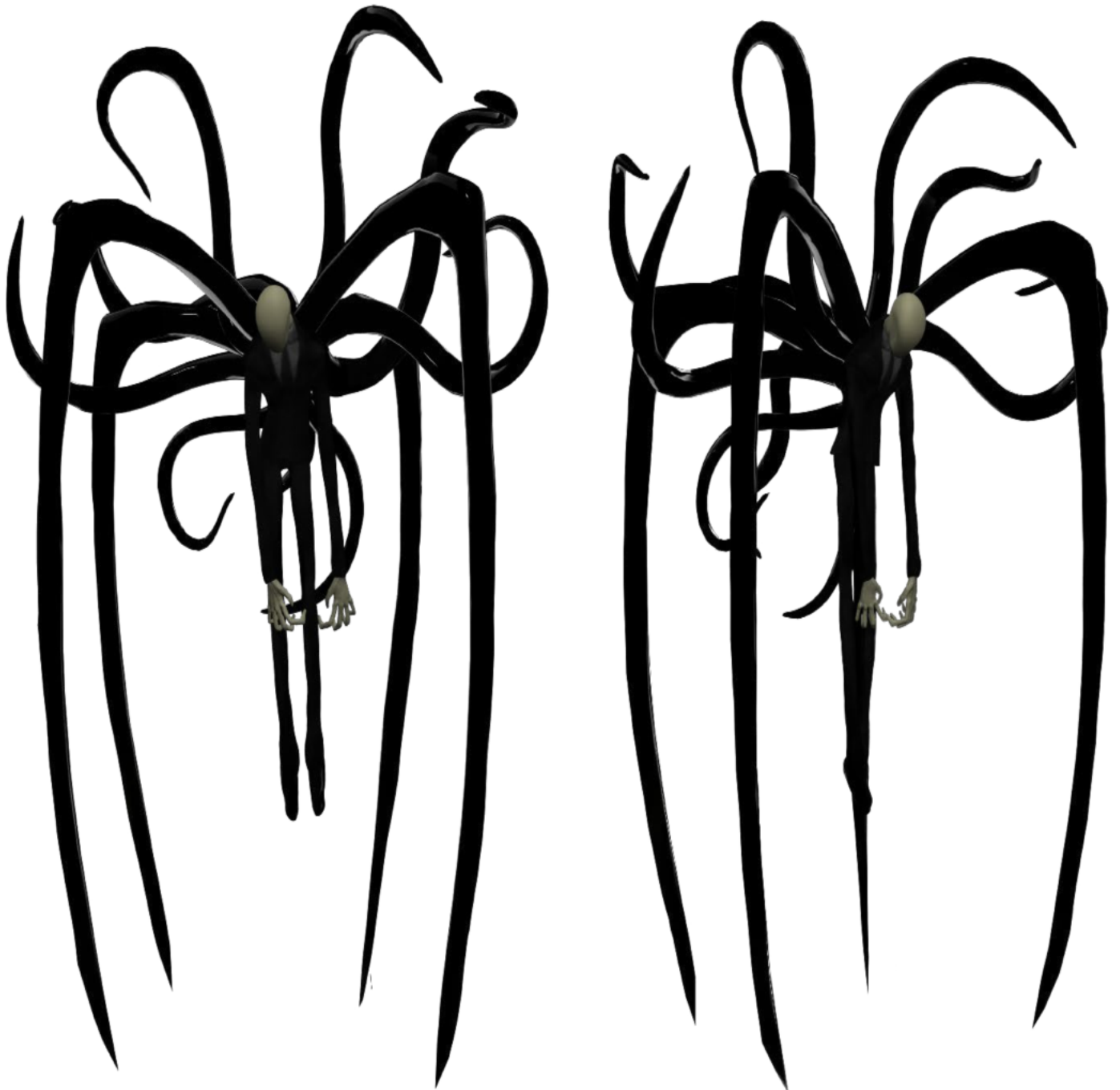
Elementary

This map is located in an elementary school where it is apparent that something terrible has occurred. There are splats of blood on the walls and body parts are strewn about. You must collect 8 teddy bears that have been impaled on hooks before Slenderman captures you. While this level lacks the darkness of the other levels,

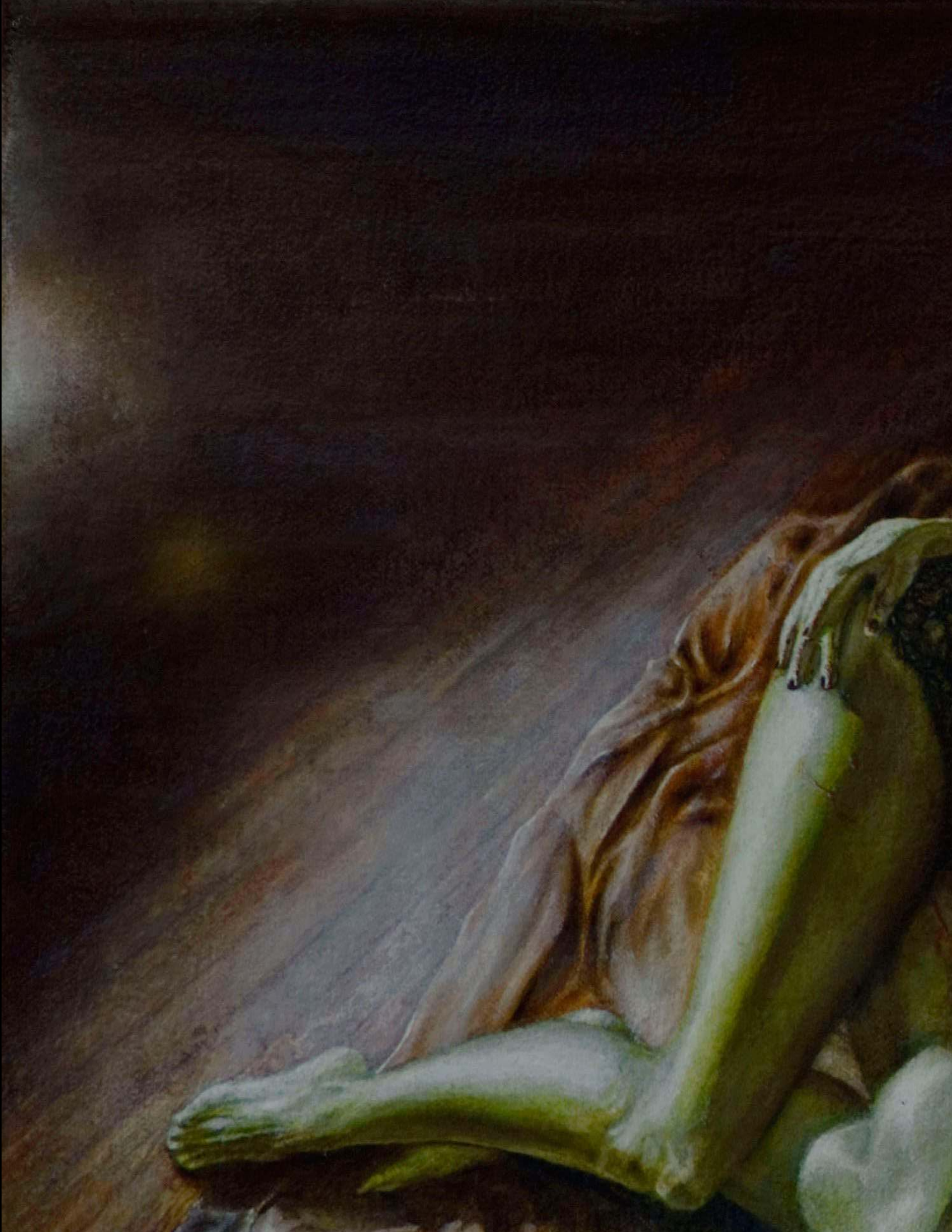
the bleak whiteness and fog more than make up for the fact that you do not need to use a flashlight.

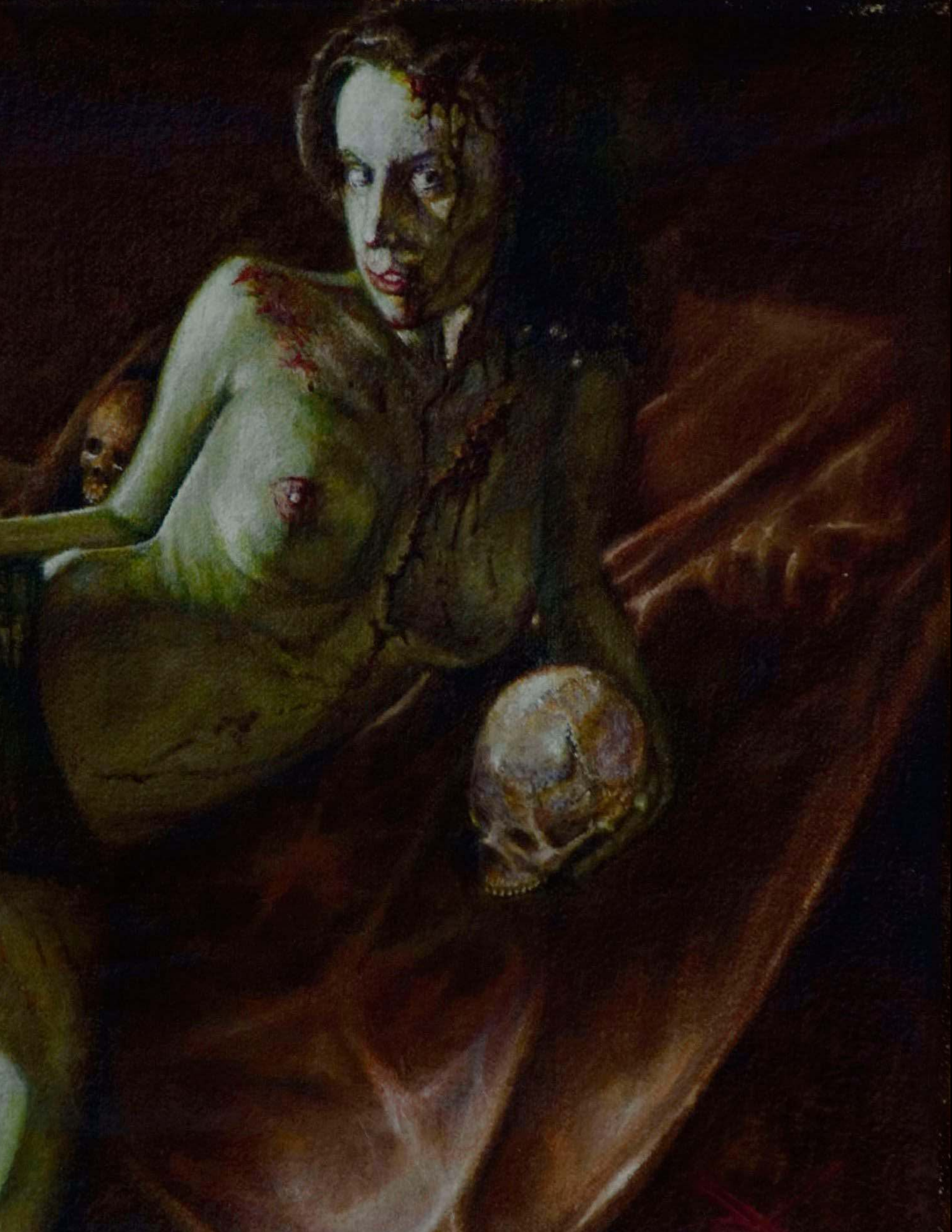
Mansion

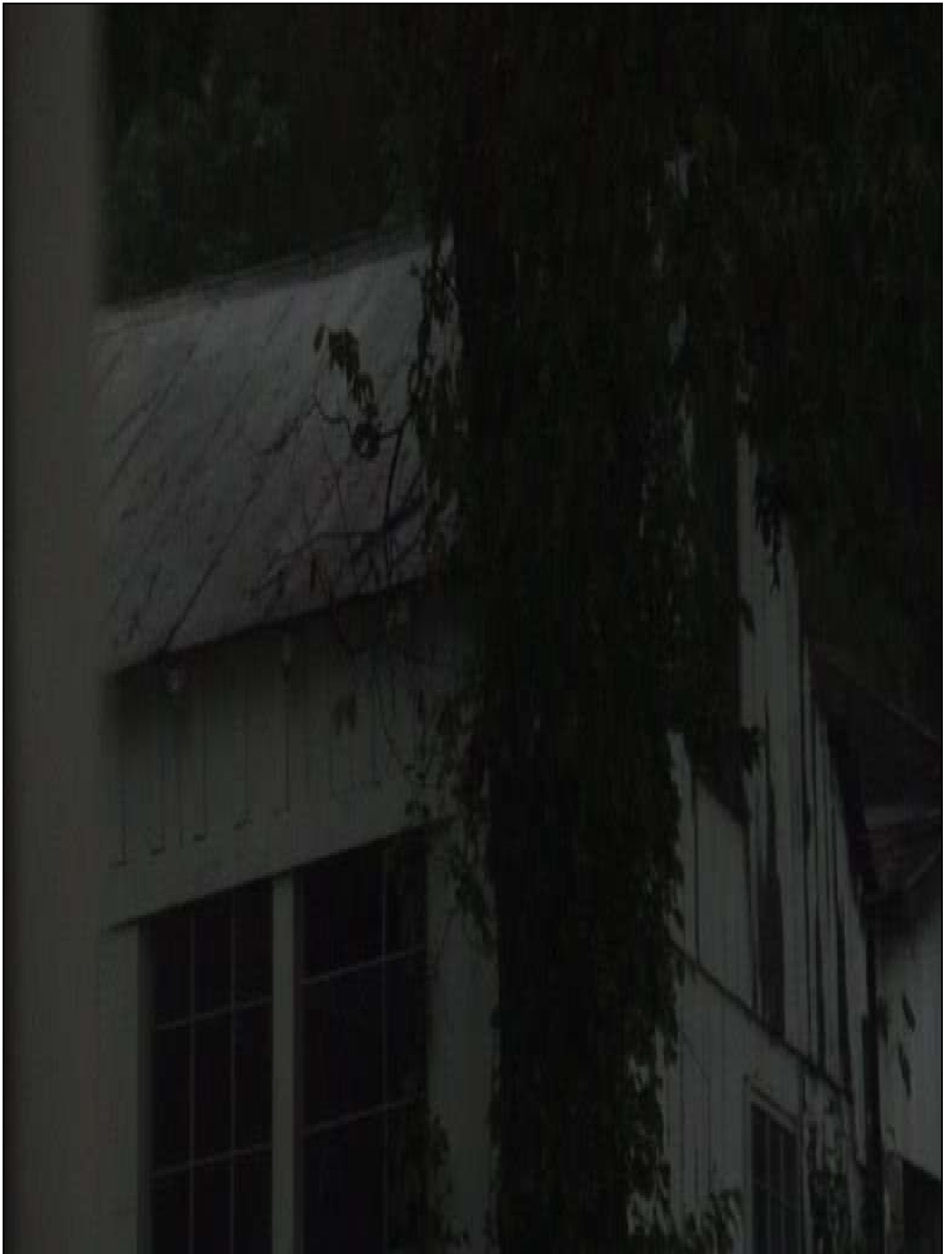
The Mansion is the newest installment at the time of writing, as well as my absolute favourite. No matter how many times I die I am eager to restart. The introduction of some new mechanics make this game slightly more complex; now we have to deal with finding keys to locked doors, and the items are no longer memos or object clones, and they emit a slight shine. This time we have a small back story: you are a man who has been stalked by Slenderman for months and has fallen into a coma from the Slender sickness. You are trapped in your memory of your childhood home and you are collecting childhood memories before Slender gets you. From the music of the loading screen and the lightning strikes that illuminate the halls, this level has a wonderfully creepy atmosphere. If you are not inclined to play every Slenderman game out there, I highly recommend this one.

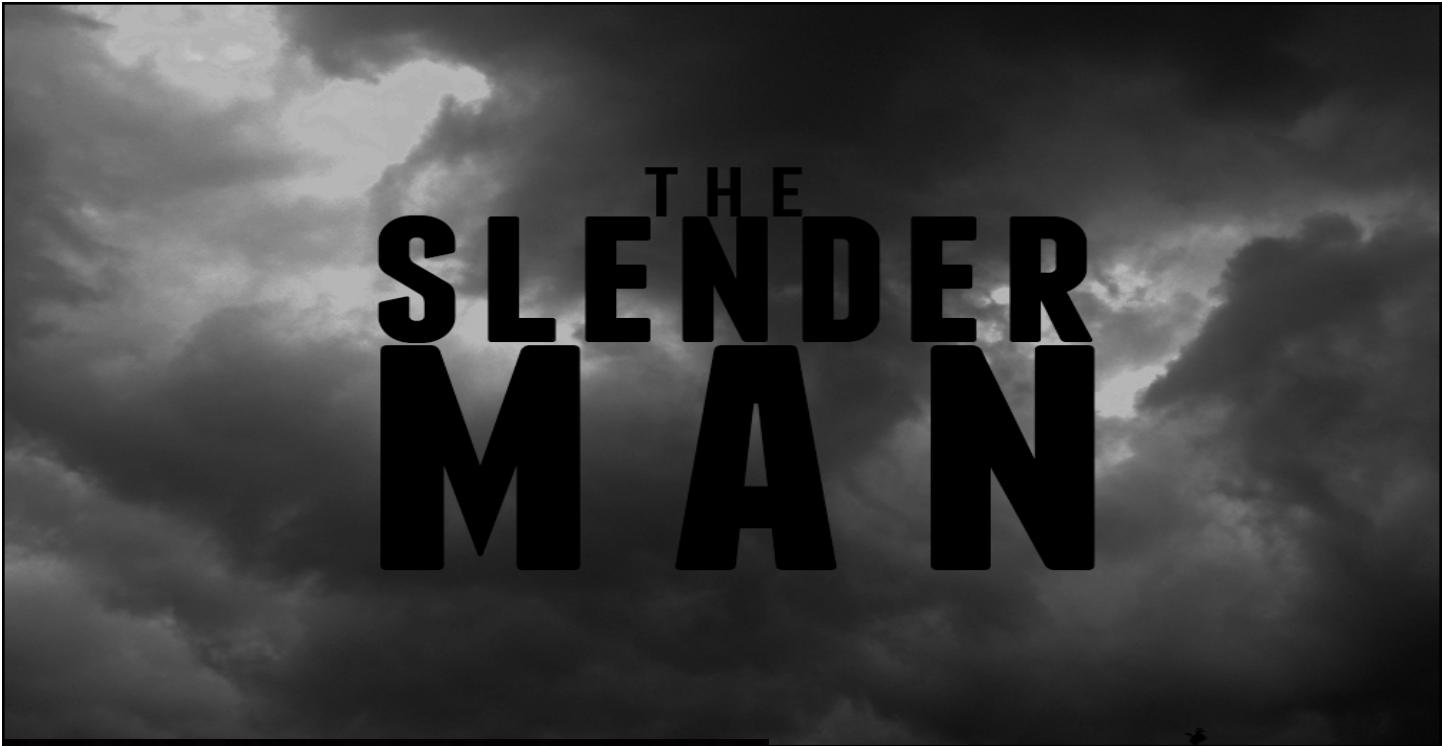


stock by: <http://dimelotu.deviantart.com/>










THE SLENDER MAN



Daniel Gonzales: So how did the Slender Man movie project come about?

Anthony Meadows: The Slender Man movie has been a long time coming for me. I've always wanted to make a feature length found-footage/horror film, and back in '09 when the Slender Man meme took off, I instantly fell in love with the mythos. After graduating film school, I knew that I wanted to launch a Kickstarter project to fund a full-length film, and it wasn't until the indie videogame 'Slender' was released that I knew what that Kickstarter campaign was going to be. In early July, 'Slender' hit the web and shoved the Slender Man mythos back into the front of the internet's collective consciousness so I immediately hashed out an idea for a feature length film that would be cheap to produce and relatively easy to schedule and shoot within a short timeframe. After we came up with a story outline

we were proud of, we put together the Kickstarter campaign and launched it.

DG: What is the basic plot of the film and how does it tie into the urban legend of Slender Man?

AM: Well, my pal Jeremy Kirk and I have both been fans of the Slender Man phenomenon since its inception and wanted to build a story that took elements, from the surface level, of these different types of media that the internet was creating. We wanted to pay tribute to the mythos while at the same time, adding our own twist. Jeremy wrote the first draft of the script and then he and I whittled it down into a lean and tight final draft. The film focuses on three different stories and how they each intertwine and eventually collide at the film's climax.

The first story is about a brother and sister in their 20's who come back to their childhood town for their dad's funeral. The second story is about a man named Hank who kidnaps children in the same town, in hopes of "feeding" them to the Slender Man. The third story revolves around a private investigator who is tracking and researching the kidnappings in the area.

DG: It seems like recently there has been a lot of talk about Slender Man and other urban legends online, I didn't even know about Slender Man until recently. How long have you known about the myth?

AM: I've known about the Slender Man myth since late '09 when my brother-in-law first told me to Google it. Thanks to him, I've had many sleepless nights.

DG: Do you believe Slender Man is real?

AM: A part of me wants to believe the Slender Man is real, and a part of me knows that I'd piss myself if I ever found out he was real. On second though. No, I don't think he's real and I hope to God or Satan or whoever, that he doesn't!

DG: Are you basing the film on real accounts and case studies?

AM: Jeremy and I have based the film on serial kidnappings and analyzing the psychological state a person must be in to commit such crimes. But mostly, the film has been based on the collective pieces of fiction created by the Slender Man forums and communities.

DG: When does the film begin shooting? What is the projected release date?

AM: We started shooting the film at the beginning of September and we'll be wrapped in early October. We're hoping to take on a few film festivals, and if the film doesn't go any further, then we'll be releasing it online. We're hoping to have the film available for all sometime by the end of the year.

DG: What are your hopes for this film? What festivals will you enter it in?

AM: Our goal is to get in to South by Southwest and perhaps Slamdance. We'll also be entering the movie to a few horror film festivals as well. We hope to have the film picked up for some kind of distribution (digital or otherwise). We just really want to make sure that as many people as possible can watch our film.







<http://deadguyllc.deviantart.com/>





BURYING MR TENNYSON

BY MIRIAM SMITH CAMP

“Sure is a shitty time to be digging a hole. The ground’s near frozen.”

“Well, we dig as the demand calls for it. They say people die a lot around the holidays, you know.”

“What’s that got to do with anything? What’s that got to do with our situation?” Benny kicked the blade of shovel and shook the away the dirt that fell on the little moon on his shoe. Overcast remained.

“Just making a statement, that’s all. Makes the work go faster. What are doing, trying to kick a hole in the ground?”

“What? Boot’s dirty.”

“That’s why you wear boots!”

With every jab, two shovels gnawed into the growing frost. Joe fixed his face toward the hole; Benny fixed his on Joe’s face. The light of the moon filtered through the passing clouds, and the light of the flashlight illuminated their accomplishment.

In two hours, these two had dug a three-foot hole.

“I gotta take a rest.”

“A rest?”

“I’m cold!”

“You’ve barely done anything!”

“It’s deep enough, ain’t it?”

“Deep enough? What do you think’s going in there?”

Benny stomped his dance to a close.

“I heard something.”

“Wind. Cemetery’s closed. All we are is a couple of a gravediggers doing their job.”

“Yeah that’s what we look like.”

“That’s what we are.”

“But that’s the trouble I think. Problem is that I think we’re making wrong assumptions. Last time I went to a graveyard, it was in the middle of the day and they had all these little dozers and shit, real technological stuff for digging the graves. Trouble is I don’t think anyone digs by hand anymore.”

“We dig by hand.”

“Alright. I know. I know, it’s just – you know what an anachronism is? That’s us. That’s what we look like. Real gravediggers – they don’t do this with shovels in the middle of the night.”

“Funny. I always wondered why anyone would dig a grave in the middle of the night when there was no shame in being seen in the daylight doing what one was supposed to do.”

“Exactly. We shouldn’t be here.”

“But funny still that the trope of the gravedigger is such that one automatically assumes a lone or partnered man on the fringe of society, digging away by the fading light of a lantern and the moon in the sky.”

“See, that’s what I’m talking about! So what did you used to do before you started working for Boogeyman?”

“I taught drama at NYU.”

“Really?”

“No you dumb shit! Get down there and dig or I’ll be burying you and Mr. Tennyson together.”

“Nah. You wouldn’t kill me Joe. You’re not a killer. You’re a clean up man.”

“So are you. Dig. Digging warms you up.”

The two hacked away at the ground. The hood of Benny’s car peered out from between overgrown hedges, reflecting the light of the moon and the dark clouds that raced across the sky.

A snowflake landed on Joe’s ear. He looked up.

Benny kept his eyes on Joe as he bent down for the flashlight. Click. He slipped a hand into his pocket and wiped his nose with the other.

“Kneel.”

“What?”

“Makes the work go faster.”

Joe reached into his jacket pockets, patted his pants pockets, and then his breast pocket.

“Now, Joe. It’s cold out.”

Joe froze.

“Now.”

Joe crouched down, raised his hands, and then paused. “Wait. I just talked to Boogeyman. He said it was cool. I swear. Call him. Ask him. He said it was cool!”

“I’m not going to call Boogeyman. Just kneel down. Nice and easy, now.”

“You’re not a killer, Benny. You’re a clean up man too.”

Benny took a step.

“Okay, okay!” Joe dropped to his knees.

“Good. No one is going to get hurt. It’ll be over real soon, Joe. That’s good Joe.”

“Come on, Benny.”

The frost crunched under Benny’s boots. He kneeled down behind Joe, one knee, then the other, rocking into place. Joe whipped his head around, but Benny pressed his pocket into Joe’s back.

“Don’t be a bad boy now, Joe.”

“Oh for Chrissake’s, is this a joke? This isn’t funny. Stop being a fag.”

Benny put a hand on Joe’s shoulder. He traced his hand around Joe’s waist and on Joe’s zipper.

“You fucking psycho! Are you crazy?” Joe groped at the space behind him, but Benny shoved his pocket harder into Joe’s back.

“Sh.”

“I’m gonna kill you. I will fucking -“

“Sh. Hands up now. Good boy.” Benny pressed Joe’s torso into the ground. Joe rolled his face toward the dirt.

“This isn’t fucking funny. Okay, ha ha. Get out of here. Oh come on, man! You got me, okay? You got me. No! Oh my God, are you fucking serious?”

Joe lay on the hardening lip of the grave below him. Benny’s ominous pocket dangled and bumped into Joe’s hip.

“Sh. That’s a good boy, Joe. No more talking now. Good, good.” Benny pushed Joe’s face into the dirt.

The clouds hung over the sky as the snow continued to fall, flakes landing on Joe’s face, hands, ears and thighs, disintegrating and trickling down into the dirt below.

His hair was cast in downy fluff, snow falling on snow. Snow melting and little rivers running down the crevices tightening around Joe’s eyes, around his cheeks, around his lips and teeth. Cold rivers meeting hot

rivers turning into rapid waterfalls, snaking around his nose and pooling into the grave below.

The earth hummed with the pitter-patter of flakes nestling on each other. Grunts kept time with a gasp or two out of key.

The whole world held its breath and heard the crackle of one drop of blood melting hair-thin networks of ice on grass. Joe heard it all:

Pit-pit.

Pit-pat.

Git-gap.

Get up.

Get up.

GET UP GET UP!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING GET UP AND KILL HIM!

Benny stopped and squeeze Joe's hips and pulled the man's head up out of the dirt.

"Do you think that we're really alone in the universe?"

Joe gasp and spit. Benny pressed Joe's head down, rolling it in the soil.

"I said 'Do you think we're alone in the universe?' I'm serious Joe. This is serious shit."

"What?"

"I mean, not right now – well, wait – yeah, maybe right now, I mean –"

"Sure."

"You do?"

"I mean 'no.'"

"Do you think that the aliens have a god that's like our god? The same god?" Benny grunted. "I mean, do you think that Jesus came to save the aliens too?"

Benny steadied himself.

Joe winced.

"Or maybe God's plan for aliens is entirely different from God's plan for people?"

"I . . ." Joe bucked. Benny was narrowly displaced.

"Whoa! You hit a high note there, Frankie Valli!"

"Uh, um . . ."

“I gotta know. Do you think that aliens have to earn Heaven too? Do they go to Hell?” Benny’s laid on Joe. His pocket pressed into Joe’s hip.

“Sure.”

“That’s too bad. I’d like to think that somewhere in the universe is a race of unflawed beings who never ate the Apple, never had to leave the Garden.”

Benny pushed Joe’s face into the dirt and held himself up with it as he buried himself, burying Benny. He arched his back, shuddered, and collapsed on Joe.

Benny rolled on his back and watched the clouds waft by as his panting slowed to breathing. Joe laid next to him, cupped in the earth.

Joe rubbed his knee on Benny’s thigh. “Okay, um – so. All right, come on, Joe. We gotta get Mr. Tennyson in here before sunrise.”

He patted Joe’s leg. Joe gasped, scrambled to his feet and stumbled as he tugged his pants from around his knees.

Benny rose and brushed the snow from his sides. “Do you have a hard-on, Joe?”

Joe twisted around and pulled up his pants. Benny engrossed himself in shaking the dirt from his shoes.

Joe looked around – at the car, the hedges, the streetlights in the distance, the grave, his abandoned shovel and the snowflakes that had collected in the blade, Benny’s shoes – and at the clouds that had veiled the moon. He wiped his nose on his sleeve. He turned his face to the moon and wiped his eyes.

The cemetery was a field of iridescent down, undisturbed by footprints, as if the clouds had descended upon the earth and retired while he wasn’t looking, everywhere but where they just were, a vestige of night’s turmoil, a bed disturbed by the thrashing brought by the nightmares of the occupant prone, still caught in the haze of terror.

Joe stumbled onto that corpse of a screaming snow angel, splayed and hanging on the mouth of the abyss. He grabbed his shovel and jabbed it into the angel’s head, once, then again, faster and faster, flinging dirt across the virgin snow.

“Fuck!”

He decapitated it. He severed its spine. He shredded its arms and amputated its legs until there was nothing but a hole.

Fuck!

He tore into the void, over and over again, gasping, wheezing and squealing.

“Fucker! Motherfucker!”

“That’s the spirit, Joe!” Benny said, hopping off the last of the dirt on his shoes. “We’ll be out of here in no time!”

The clouds, having released the last tufts of their load, freed the moon just enough to illuminate their accomplishment. Joe was panting and holding his sides.

“It’s not deep enough,” he said. “It’s not deep enough,” he said, poking at the ground, releasing no earth. “We can’t bury him like this. We gotta get done there. Way down there.”

Benny dropped his shovel. “Well, I’m done.”

The men trudged to the car. Peering out between the passenger seat and the console was the butt of a revolver. Joe stopped by the passenger door and looked in.

“Get it if you want,” Benny said. “But if you want to tell Boogeyman why you did it, go ahead. I’m sure he’ll understand. Here.” Benny offered his cell phone. “Do you want a blessing?”

Joe put his hands in his pocket and followed Benny to the trunk.

“Holy shit,” Benny said. “He’s so little.”

Mr. Tennyson was swaddled and frozen into a crescent. In the moonlight, he was a white larvae. A small “6” cut into his Adam’s and apple rose out from his collar.

“He kinda looks like you, Joe,” Benny said.

Joe picked up Mr. Tennyson in his arms and carried the bundle as they shuffled to him to his cradle.

They took turns tossing dirt on it.

Benny paused. “I think someone’s going to find this real soon.”

Joe looked up at Benny’s face then rolled his gaze back at the grave. “They’re supposed to find it, Benny. That’s the point.”

“Oh yeah? I thought he was supposed to disappear.”

“No, Benny. That’s why Boogeyman leaves the calling card.”

“Huh. You think Boogeyman’s job is hard?”

“I don’t know.”

“Really? See, I don’t think it would be that hard, actually. Empathy is one thing, sure, but when you

consider how many people die everyday at the hands of others, odds are that one could easily just do it and not think about it later.”

“Maybe.”

“By the time it’s over, a man could still be objective. Rationalize it. You know, they say that mankind really only has two definite predators – germs and other people. It’s the circle of life, isn’t it then, to destroy another guy?”

“Yeah.”

“Yeah, it is. Do you think we’re just a part of the circle of life, Joe?”

“Yeah, Benny.”

“A culmination of the dog-eat-dog world we live in, right? That’s our plight, isn’t it? Dog-eat-dog, man-eat-man, violence, destruction, death?”

“Sure.”

“See, I don’t know. In the end, it would seem that it’s the cycle, or even the originator of the cycle that is the ultimate predator, and that, in the grand scheme of things, you think you’re on top, but that’s only because the domino behind you knocked you over on the domino in front of you. You know what I mean?”

“Sure I do.”

“Even still, I think it would be easier to just leave it in plain sight. I mean, what’s the point of the suspense anyway?”

Joe stared down at Mr. Tennyson’s 6. “Suspense causes fear, disbelief. Mystery. People fill in the holes and terrify themselves. Then they disbelieve their own imaginations.”

“That’s pretty deep, I understand, but is that efficient, or is just vanity to put one’s self at risk in order to tell a story? Boogeyman gets paid either way. I mean, wouldn’t it be a more effective marketing ploy for Boogeyman to have us simply dump the body on the side of the road, with his little calling card, and not out here all night to make it look like we’re hiding something when we’re actually not?”

“That’s how he works.”

“Me, I’m not like that. I’m a big fan of Occam’s Razor. No loose ends, no drama, no dangling-“

“Well why don’t you just go in business for yourself then, asshole?”

The men stared at each other.

Joe wiped his nose on his sleeve and looked at the grave.

“I’m sorry, Benny. I didn’t mean nothing by it.”

The sky faded to lavender as the two men got into the car. Benny put in a CD and Joe sang along quietly and tapped on the steering wheel to it as they drove away. He drove out of the cemetery and onto the highway. Joe looked out the window, watching the car toss sludge onto the side of the road.

The reflection of streetlights rolled over the butt of Joe's gun. Slowly, he let his fingers brush against it. First, his index finger, then his thumb, then cradling it, sliding the piece out from between the seats. He grasped it in his left hand all the while looking at Benny, who fixed his gaze on the road.

The CD skipped. Benny blinked and gripped the wheel.

Joe gripped his gun and slid his finger on the trigger.

The sky turned from lavender to orange and then to blue and gray. Joe's knuckles turned white. The two men cut through the morning as the cars of other men cluttered the roads, crawling and slipping on the new snow and black ice. Joes and Bennys and Mr. Tennysons sat behind steering wheels heading to anywheres, passing anyones, singing along to songs, riding the asses of anyones, blinking red eyes at windshields.

Joe saw it in Benny's pocket. It was poking out and bouncing gently with the rocking of the car: the handle of his flashlight.

Joe eased his gun into own his pocket, crossed his arms around his chest, and watched as the lines in the road slithered by among the dirty rivers of melting snow.

=





THE ORIGINS OF HALLOWEEN

BY MISTER TRECE

Samhain (pronounced Sow-en), dates back to the ancient Celts who lived 2,000 years ago. Contrary to what some believe, is not a celebration of a Celtic god of the dead. Instead, it is a Celtic word meaning “summer’s end.” The Celts believed that summer came to an end on October 31st and the New Year began on November 1st with the start of winter. But the Celts also followed a lunar calendar and their celebrations began at sunset the night before.

Many today see Halloween as the pagan holiday. But that’s not really accurate. As the pagan holiday of Samhain is on November 1st. But their celebrations did and still do, start at sunset on October 31st, on Samhain Eve. During the day on October 31st, the fires within the home are extinguished. Often families would engage in a good “fall” cleaning to clear out the old and make way for the new. Starting the winter months with fresh and clean household items.

Halloween or Samhain had its beginnings in an ancient, pre-Christian Celtic festival of the dead. The Celtic peoples, who were once found all over Europe, divided the year by four major holidays. According to their calendar, the year began on a day corresponding to November 1st on our present calendar. The date marked the beginning of winter. Since they were pastoral people, it was a time when cattle and sheep had to be moved to closer pastures and all livestock had to be secured for the winter months. Crops were harvested and stored. The date marked both an ending and a beginning in an eternal cycle.

At sunset on October 31, clans or local villages begin the formal ceremonies of Samhain by lighting a giant bonfire. The people would gather around the fire to burn crops and animals as sacrifices to the Celtic deities. It was a method of giving the Gods and Goddesses their share of the previous years herd or crops. In addition these sacred fires were a big part of the cleansing of the old year and a method to prepare for the coming new year.

During the celebration, the Celts wore costumes, and danced around the bonfire. Many of these dances told stories or played out the cycles of life and death or commemorated the cycle of Wheel of Life. These costumes were adorned for three primary reasons.

The first was to honor the dead who were allowed to rise from the Otherworld. The Celts believed that souls were set free from the land of the dead during the eve of Samhain. Those that had been trapped in the bodies of animals were released by the Lord of the Dead and sent to their new incarnations. The wearing of these costumes signified the release of these souls

into the physical world.

In addition to celebrations and dance, it was believed that this thin veil between the physical world and the Otherworld provided extra energy for communications between the living and the dead. With these communications, Druid Priests, and Celtic Shamans would attempted to tell the fortunes of individual people through a variety of methods. For a people entirely dependent on the volatile natural world, these prophecies were an important source of comfort and direction during the long, dark winter.

Some historians have suggested that these early people were the first to use tiles made from wood and painted with various images which were the precursor to Tarot Cards. There's no real evidence to support this, but the 'story' of these tiles has lingered for centuries.

When the community celebration was over, each family would take a torch or burning ember from the sacred bonfire and return to their own home. The home fires that has been extinguished during the day were re-lit by the flame of the sacred bonfire to help protect the dwelling and it's inhabitants during the coming winter. These fires were kept burning night and day during the next several months. It was believed that if a home lost it's fire, tragedy and troubles would soon follow. With the hearth fires lit, the families would place food and drink outside their doors. This was done to appease the roaming spirits who might play tricks on the family.

With the coming of Christianity in the 800s AD, the early Church in England tried to Christianize the old Celtic festivals. Pope Boniface IV designated the 1st of November as "All Saints Day," honoring saints and martyrs. He also decreed October 31 as "All Hallows Eve", that eventually became Hallow'een. As a result of their efforts to wipe out "pagan" holidays, such as Samhain, the Christians succeeded in effecting major transformations in it. In 601 A.D. Pope Gregory the First issued a now famous edict to his missionaries concerning the native beliefs and customs of the peoples he hoped to convert. Rather than try to obliterate native peoples' customs and beliefs, the pope instructed his missionaries to use them: if a group of people worshipped a tree, rather than cut it down, he advised them to consecrate it to Christ and allow its continued worship.

In terms of spreading Christianity, this was a brilliant concept and it became a basic approach used in Catholic missionary work. Church holy days were purposely set to coincide with native holy days. Christmas, for instance, was assigned the arbitrary date of December 25th because it corresponded with the mid-winter celebration of many peoples. Likewise, St. John's Day was set on the summer solstice. Also called All-hallows Eve or All-hallowmas (from Middle English Alholowmesse meaning All Saints' Day). 200 years later, in 1000 AD, the church made November 2 All Souls' Day, a day to honor the dead. It is celebrated similarly to Samhain, with big bonfires, parades, and dressing up in costumes as saints, angels, and devils. Together, the three celebrations, the eve of All Saints', All Saints', and All Souls' day, are called Hallowmas.

Samhain, with its emphasis on the supernatural, was decidedly pagan. While missionaries identified their holy days with those observed by the Celts, they branded the earlier religion's supernatural deities as evil, and associated them with the devil. As representatives of the rival religion, Druids were considered evil worshippers of devilish or demonic gods and spirits. The Celtic underworld inevitably became identified with the Christian Hell.

The effects of this policy were to diminish but not totally eradicate the beliefs in the traditional gods. Celtic belief in supernatural creatures persisted, while the church made deliberate attempts to define them as being not merely dangerous, but malicious. Followers of the old religion went into hiding and were branded as witches.

The Christian feast of All Saints was assigned to November 1st. The day honored every Christian saint, especially those that did not otherwise have a special day devoted to them. This feast day was meant to substitute for Samhain, to draw the devotion of the Celtic peoples, and, finally, to replace it forever. That did not happen, but the traditional Celtic deities diminished in status, becoming fairies or leprechauns of more recent traditions.

All Saints Day, otherwise known as All Hallows (hallowed means sanctified or holy), continued the ancient Celtic traditions. The evening prior to the day was the time of the most intense activity, both human and supernatural. People continued to celebrate All Hallows Eve as a time of the wandering dead, but the supernatural beings were now thought to be evil. The folk continued to propitiate those spirits (and their masked impersonators) by setting out gifts of food and drink. Subsequently, All Hallows Eve became Hallow Evening, which became Hallowe'en--an ancient Celtic, pre-Christian New Year's Day in contemporary dress.

Many supernatural creatures became associated with All Hallows. In Ireland fairies were numbered among the legendary creatures who roamed on Halloween. An old folk ballad called "Allison Gross" tells the story of how the fairy queen saved a man from a witch's spell on Halloween.

Today Halloween is becoming once again an adult holiday or masquerade, like mardi Gras. Men and women in every disguise imaginable are taking to the streets of big American cities and parading past grinningly carved, candlelit jack o'lanterns, re-enacting customs with a lengthy pedigree. Their masked antics challenge, mock, tease, and appease the dread forces of the night, of the soul, and of the otherworld that becomes our world on this night of reversible possibilities, inverted roles, and transcendence. In so doing, they are reaffirming death and its place as a part of life in an exhilarating celebration of a holy and magic evening.



IN OUR HEARTS

BY DOUGLAS HACKLE

"I can't believe she's gone forever," Courtney squeaked through her hot tears. She and her mother, Shelly, held hands beside Grandma Irene's open casket. Courtney's father, Stanley, stood behind them, his right hand placed gently on the grieving girl's shoulder.

"She's not truly gone, honey," Shelly said, bending down to the height of her child. "She'll always be right *here*," she said, lightly tapping Courtney just under her right collarbone. "Here in your heart."

Courtney dropped her head to look inquisitively at the place where her mother had tapped her. "Is she in your heart too?" the girl said raising her wet face, sniffles abating just a bit.

"Of course she is. Watch this."

Shelly drew her right hand into a tight fist, stuffed it into her mouth, and jammed her forearm down into her body cavity up to the elbow. A second later she pulled her heart out from her overstretched lips, grasped the fist-sized organ with both hands, dug her thumbs in, broke it in half like a small loaf of bread. Inside the two upturned halves of the heart were dozens of tiny people: everyone living and deceased for whom Shelly presently felt even the smallest measure of love.

Courtney leaned toward her mother's divided heart, utterly entranced by the spectacle. She saw little copies of her aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, great grandparents, close family friends, and some people she had never met before. They all looked up at Courtney, smiled and waved. Courtney smiled and waved back. She even espied teeny versions of herself and her dad in there. They waved at her too. She waved back.

"Grandma Irene!" she exclaimed as she spotted a tiny facsimile of her most recently passed grandparent among the tightly packed, diminutive crowd.

The tiny Grandma Irene saw her too. She called out, "I love you, Courtney!"

"I love you too, Grandma Irene!" Courtney gushed. The girl turned to her mother. "So Grandma Irene is in my heart too?"

"She sure is, sweetheart."

Courtney balled a little fist, rammed it down her neck, and yanked out her heart. It took the child a moment to pry the organ open, but she succeeded. To her great delight, inside were Lilliputian versions of her family and friends. There was even a miniature of her favorite dolly. Her heart-crowd was significantly smaller than her mother's, but the girl was only six and had had much less time to give and receive love. All the living-flesh figurines in her heart smiled, waved, and blew kisses at her.

Other attendees at the funeral noticed the child's discovery. Grandpa Jeff, Aunt Peggy, and some of Courtney's older cousins approached her like communicants, their halved hearts cradled in the bowls of their hands, to show her that Grandma Irene was in their hearts too. So many miniature versions of Grandma Irene at which to smile, wave, and say *I love you!*

She turned to her dad in excitement. "Daddy, let's see the Grandma Irene that's in *your* heart. Let's see the people *you* love."

"Oh, believe me, honey, Grandma Irene's in there." Her dad chuckled nervously, loosening his tie a notch. "I'm sure the inside of my heart looks a lot like Mommy's. There's really no point in me opening it to show you."

"But Daddy, I wanna see."

Shelly rose to face her husband. Her arms slid akimbo, her brow scrunching slightly. “Yes, Stanley. I think I’d like to see too.”

Despite the cool of the air-conditioned funeral parlor, perspiration beaded Stanley’s forehead. “Really, it would just be redundant. There’s so many versions of Grandma Irene in this room right now for Courtney to see. Do we really need one more?”

Grandpa Jeff--Stanley’s father-in-law--chimed in: “Where’s the harm in it, Stan? Whaddaya got to hide?”

Dozens of other funeral-goers--all holding their halved hearts in their hands--began to congregate around Stanley.

“Yeah, Stanley. Let’s see what’s inside your heart,” someone said.

“Yeah, Stan. What’s to hide?” another person echoed above similar murmurs of agreement from the gathering crowd.

The dumb and guilty expression pasted on his face waxing dumber and guiltier by the second, Stanley sprinted toward the central hallway.

Many in the crowd quickly swallowed their hearts and gave chase.

Stanley made his escape through the front entrance of the funeral home, his pursuers not far behind. He dashed across the front lawn and, in his panic, neglected to look both ways as he attempted to run headlong across the main road.

A speeding tow truck mowed him over, killing him instantly.

Though the cause of death was obvious, an autopsy was performed on Stanley for the purpose of a clinical research study examining the effects of trauma deaths on internal organs. Shelly called the coroner the day after the autopsy was performed. She was frank about the purpose of her call.

“Did you happen to open his . . . heart?”

“Yes, we did.”

“It was empty, right?” This had been her first guess--that her husband had not loved anyone.

“No, Mrs. Smith. His heart was not empty.”

“Then there was some bimbo bitch in there, right?” she asked. “Or more than one?” Shelly began to sob softly.

“No, we didn’t find any women in your husband’s heart, Mrs. Smith.”

“Then I bet you found a little version of himself in there, didn’t you?” she said, not having considered that possibility before. “That’s probably the only person that bastard ever loved. That’s why he ran away, isn’t it?”

“That’s not what we found, mam.”

She was baffled. “Okay, I . . . I give up,” she said, trying to stifle her sobs. “Who was in there?”

“It’s more like *what* was in there, Mrs. Smith. I think you’d better come down to the office and let me show you myself.”

Shelly sat across from the coroner at the man’s immense desk at the center of which lay a steel medical tray covered by a lid.

“This, Mrs. Smith, is what we found inside your husband’s heart,” the coroner said. He leaned forward, removed the lid from the tray.

Inside the receptacle was a tiny wooden coffin, the old-fashioned kind with the classic tapered hexagonal shape.

Shelly raised her eyes to meet those of the coroner. The man nodded somberly, gestured for her to open it. “Please,” he added.

Reluctantly, Shelly reached forward, pinched the tiny lid of the coffin between her forefinger and thumb and removed it.

Ensnconced within was some sort of hybrid mannequin/rag doll/scarecrow/blow up doll figure. The thing was dressed in a pair of bib overalls onto which had been stitched a chaotic patchwork of different colored and patterned scraps of fabric. A prominent duct tape swastika adorned the thing's chest. The figure's stiff-looking, alabaster arms had obviously been harvested from a mannequin. Its legs were the hay-stuffed pant legs of the overalls, the stringy stuffing protruding from the bottoms in true scarecrow fashion.

The figure's blow up doll head was capped with a garish wig of long, curly, pink and purple hair, like something from a Halloween store.

But the face

And the most horrific thing about the face was *not* the red pentagram that happened to be painted at the center of its forehead. Rather, it was the eye sockets and the o-shaped mouth; for although the wasps were difficult to see due to the proportionally small scale of everything, the eyes sockets and mouth-hole were churning with them--*living, twitching, crawling wasps*.

The interior of the plastic head was home to their hive.

Shelly recoiled in horror. "You mean to tell me that this . . . this *thing*, was the only thing in the world Stanley held dear to his heart, the only thing he loved? That he felt more for this . . . this grotesque mockery of a person than he did for his own flesh-and-blood daughter?"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Smith," was all the solace the coroner was able to provide.

Shelly took it home with her, put it in a shoebox, put the shoebox up on the top shelf of her closet. She buried her husband two days later.

Courtney needed her badly, so Shelly began her new life as a widow focused on the difficult and daily task of helping her daughter deal with her grief. But as focused as she was on that duty, she could not get the thing out of her mind.

The little coffin in the shoebox in her closet.

A month later, she took the shoebox down from the closet shelf, sat down on her bed, extracted the coffin, and removed its lid. Out of curiosity, Shelly poked the doll-thing's mid-riff, recoiling at the unexpected mushy texture her fingertip encountered, as if beneath the patchwork fabric the thing's belly were indeed filled with actual guts or some other similarly and sickeningly soft material.

"Where are you?" she asked it in a whisper. "Where is the real you? The big you? The original you?"

Tiny wasps like fleas circled the doll-thing's ghastly, unresponsive head.

The question had been driving Shelly batty ever since she'd first laid eyes on the doll-thing that day at the coroner's office, for she knew that somewhere out in the world was a real coffin with a full-size version of this thing inside it. However, she instinctively knew the original was not anywhere near her home. It certainly was not buried in the basement of the house or in the backyard somewhere; Stanley was too cautious by nature to have brought his secret so near to the family.

As part of his job, Stanley had often been required to travel throughout the country, which meant the coffin and its strange occupant could be buried in the woods somewhere in as many as twenty different states. He had also gone backpacking in Europe immediately after graduating college. Was the thing somewhere across the pond then? In the outskirts of London? Amsterdam? Paris? Prague? Rome? And just because the doll-thing was stashed inside a coffin did not necessitate that the coffin was buried. Was the rough-hewn box tucked away in the basement or attic of some abandoned house somewhere?

It could be anywhere.

She had wanted to confront the tiny version of Stanley that resided in her heart with these questions,

but it appeared that the little Stanleys that had dwelled inside the hearts of anyone still living who loved the man were all mysteriously gone now, as if Stanley's lack of reciprocity of those feelings of love had annihilated every last one of them. A miniature copy of the man could not even be found in his own daughter's heart anymore.

Why? Why had Stanley loved such a thing? *How* could he have loved such a thing?

She'd surely lose her mind if she never found out.

Then she had an idea--a spontaneous, irrational, rash, reckless, and undoubtedly unnatural idea, but an idea nevertheless.

She reached down into her body, retrieved her heart, opened it. Ignoring the little waves and smiles of her miniaturized loved ones, she gingerly plucked the doll-thing from the coffin and placed it inside one half of her heart, right in the thick of the throng. Shelly did not pause before fitting the heart back together so that she did not have time to notice the tiny looks of terror as everyone backed away from the repulsive newcomer that had just been placed in their midst. Shelly inserted her heart into her mouth, forced it back down into her chest cavity.

With her eyes now drawn to her closet door, she continued to sit on the edge of her bed as the love she presently felt for anyone living or dead--for her daughter, parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents, friends--gradually evaporated as if it had never been in the first place.

The fading of the love wasn't painful. It just was.

Simultaneously, a new love ballooned inside her to replace the old.

She understood now.

She forgave Stanley.

Besotted by the woozy feeling of longing and deep affection that now swelled inside her chest and the accompanying erotic tingle that flared in her pelvis, Shelly got up from the bed and crossed the floor to her closet, from which now issued a frenzied tapping sound, something like raindrops on the roof or mice scampering behind a baseboard. She turned the doorknob, pulled the closet door open.

An elongated, wooden deathbox stood upright against the back wall.

With the closet door wide open, the frenetic tapping was much louder, now joined by a low droning buzz. Shelly smiled when she realized what the tapping noise was: wasps colliding against the inside of the coffin lid.

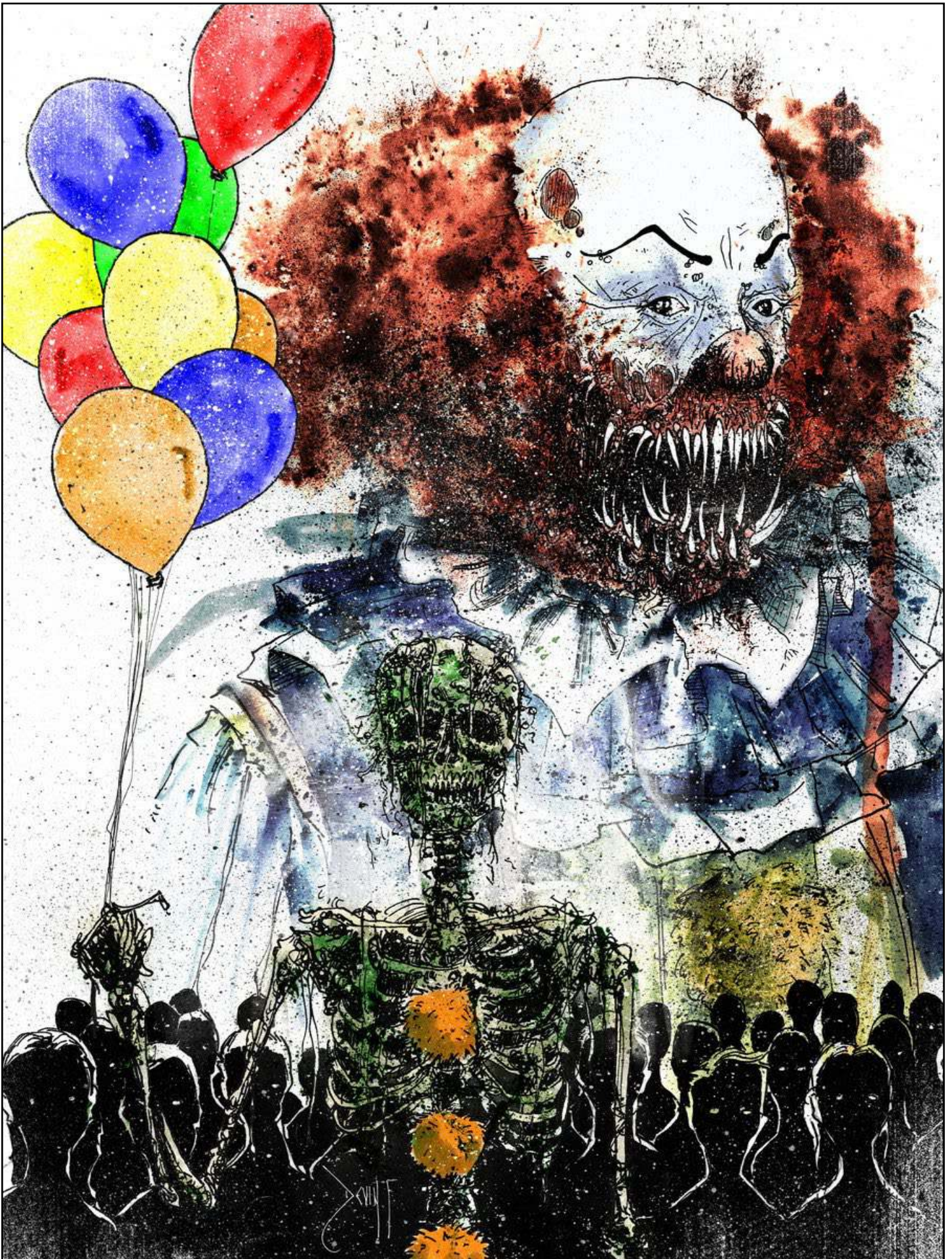
She grasped the lid with both hands; it came off easily, not being affixed to the coffin, and she set it off to the side.

Extending forth slowly as if not to startle Shelly, two alabaster arms reached out from the dark of the coffin, inviting Shelly into their embrace.

She stepped deeper into the closet, let the stiff arms envelope her.

She opened her mouth and leaned in to passionately kiss the bristling, buzzing mouth-hole of her beloved.





OF DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES

The stories of Stephen King in film and television

By L. V. Kramhøft

The season of the ghouls is approaching and you've decided to host this year's Halloween party! But what theme should you pick for the horror movie marathon? How about a bloody bucketful of Stephen King adaptations?!

The King of Horror?

It was a dark and stormy night a couple of weeks ago. I was watching some old horror anthology movie with a friend of mine, and at some point we started talking about Stephen King's "Creepshow", and my friend blurted out that he didn't think King "was a very good writer."

Now, having been a fan of King's books since I was a teenager, I had to enquire on what basis he delivered his judgment.

It turned out my friend had never actually read any of King's books.

And there you have it. King is one of those writers that people tend to form an opinion on without even having read his work.

Ramsey Campbell might have won more awards, Clive Barker might be more imaginative, and Jack Ketchum might have topped King when it comes to sheer gut-wrenching gruesomeness, but ask anyone who's not an avid genre fan if they know these writers, and the blank expressions on their faces will tell you all you need to know; that none of King's peers – from Peter Straub to Harper Lee, however brilliant their work might be – have achieved the same degree of widespread mainstream fame that King has garnered.

Much like Stan Lee in the field of comics and J. K. Rowling in fantasy, King is one of those giants that have managed to strike a chord with a wider audience, and transcend the relative anonymity normally associated with his genre; he has long since become a regular super-star.

With 49 novels, nine collections of short stories and more than 50 movies and TV productions bearing his name, King's is a name that horror-fans either love or love to hate.

What makes King special, apart from his prolific output and seeming ubiquitous, is not so much the horrors he conjures up, but rather his keen eye for observation and his ability to put the reader into the shoes of his characters. In his novels and stories, King sends us back in time to be twelve years old and in love with Beverly Marsh who has hair like "winter fire" in "IT", and he constrains us to a bed with a broken leg, at the mercy of a homicidal fan in "Misery", and in both cases, we are simply there. His ability to get under the skin of his characters, to make you feel what they are feeling and see what they are seeing, as vividly as if you were there, is what makes him, if not the "king of horror", then at least an excellent modern writer and storyteller.

This is unfortunately also a trait that is sometimes, as we shall see, lost in the process of adapting his stories to the screen.; some stories simply works better in the medium they were intended for.

Since his debut novel "Carrie" in 1973, King has been fortunate enough to see most of his novels and a good deal of his short stories adapted for film or television by a host of famous genre directors such as George Romero, John Carpenter and Tobe Hooper. With so many titles to choose from, which should you pick for your horror movie night? Well dear reader, to help you out with that decision, I have crafted this beginners guide to the films based on the novels by Stephen King.

Now, to go through all of King's novels and movie adaptations would take up the better half (or maybe the

darker half) of this magazine, so I have been forced to delimit the scope of this guide a little bit.

I have attempted to give a rough overview of the most interesting and noteworthy adaptations from all of King's career (from the early 70s to the present day), focusing on feature films and a couple of TV-miniseries.

I have chosen to omit such films as "Apt Pupil", "The Green Mile" and "The Shawshank Redemption", which by no means is to be taken as a judgment of the quality of those works, but rather as a result of this examination's focus, namely King's horror stories.

The Early Years – Telekinesis, Vampires & A Crazy Jack Nicholson

The 70s was a dynamic decade for American film. Directors such as Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola and George Lucas was revolutionizing the ailing movie industry, and King's new brand of horror seemed like a perfect vehicle for the new breed of devil-may-care directors.

"Carrie", King's first novel, published in 1973, was turned into a movie three years later in 1976, by Brian De Palma who later went on to direct hits like "Scarface" and "Mission: Impossible."

As is the case with many of particularly King's early works – classics like "Cujo", "Christine" and "Pet Sematary", all of which has gone on to become pop-cultural household tropes – "Carrie" is based on a simple what-if concept; a teenage girl develops psychic powers and uses them to get back at the girls at school who has bullied and humiliated her. The plot is simple but powerful, and guaranteed to make you cringe your toes all the way towards film's inevitable bucket-of-blood climax.

"Carrie" is a modern horror classic, a masterpiece likely to keep you glued to the screen even more than 30 years after its conception.

Three years later, in 1979, Tobe Hooper brought King's vampire epic, "Salem's Lot" to life for the small screen as a TV-miniseries (later stitched together into a three-hour movie), and even if it feels long-winded and certainly a lot less radical than the directors own masterpiece from five years earlier, "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre", it is an excellent and often scary retelling of the classic Dracula myth.

In 1980 Stanley Kubrick turned King's masterpiece "The Shining" into a perhaps even better movie starring Jack Nicholson as the writer Jack Torrance who comes under a mysterious demonic influence and ends up terrorizing his own family. King disowned the film (Kubrick changed the ending), but that doesn't change the fact that "The Shining" stands to this day as one of the greatest horror films of all time – maybe the greatest.

Who can ever forget Jack Nicholson's line as he pokes his head through the splintered bathroom door and sneers: "Here's Johnny!"

Brilliant as it is, not even the original novel was able to leave such a lasting impression as Nicholson's diabolic descent into madness, orchestrated by the genius of Kubrick.

Hits & Misses

The eighties brought an increased commercial interest in splatter, horror and the works of Stephen King, but generally didn't achieve the same level of quality as the 70s.

The money-men had smelled blood, or rather money, and the tendency to milk King's "brand" for all it was worth began; Within the next twenty years, a host unnecessary adaptations probably did more to detract from King's reputation than anything else.

John Carpenter, the director of the original teenage slasher "Halloween", directed 1983's surprisingly toothless and corny adaptation of "Christine", a story about a cursed car, and in 1985 director Lewis Teague gave us his take of another King classic, "Cujo", about a rabid St. Bernard that terrorizes a small town. Unfortunately, both films are testaments to the fact that some of King's ideas work much better in their literary form than as movies - the concepts are either not interesting enough, or not executed well enough, to carry an entire movie.

But it wasn't all bad in the 80s, as the decade also brought us highlight such as the creepy "Lord of The Flies" inspired "Children of The Corn" from 1984, based on a short story by the same name, and "Pet Sematary" in 1989.

"Pet Sematary" was based on a story which King had originally shelved because he felt he had gone too far (!), but which ended up getting published anyway because his publisher at the time insisted on another book due on his contract.

Mary Lambert directed the movie, which, surprisingly faithful to the book, delivers a refreshingly uncompromising, no-holds barred splatter fest. The movie succeeds where "Cujo", "Christine" and many other 80s horror films failed, by challenging the limits and using its controlling idea as an evocative entry point into a rather bold discussion of bigger themes like life and death.

Both the novel and the movie also delivers enough shocks and gore to satisfy most horror fans - highlights include the close-ups of an old man getting his Achilles tendon slashed, and a man fighting a three-year old zombie armed with a scalpel – and all in all, it's a definite winner for a Halloween movie marathon.

Another notable, though lesser known King adaptation is 1986's "Stand By Me", an adaptation of the novella "The Body." Less a horror film than a thoughtful and poignant meditation on mortality, the loss of innocence and friendship among a group of twelve-year old boys, "Stand By Me" is one of the adaptations King himself is allegedly most satisfied with.

From Excellence To The Flogging Of Dead Clowns

The nineties started with a bang in the form of Tommy Lee Wallace's roller coaster of a made-for-TV-miniseries adaptation of King's largest novel (until "Under The Dome" in 2009), "IT" in 1990. Published back in 1986, "IT" is the ultimate Stephen King story – a regular "Moby Dick" of horror and a tour-de-force of all the themes and qualities King has become famous for.

The series is faithful to the book though of course omissions has been made, but more surprisingly, it is also almost as good as the book and succeeds at transferring the novel's mixture of EC Comics style horror, nostalgia and boyhood adventure to the small screen.

With its pageant of horror movie staples like the wolfman and the zombie, and of course, most memorably Tim Curry as the evil clown Pennywise (responsible for turning pretty much an entire generation into coulrophobics), "IT" has become yet another modern classic, and an obvious pick for a Halloween movie marathon.

Following "IT" the 90s brought a steady stream of classic King adaptations. "Misery", which came out the same year, brought the novel of the same name to life with a particularly memorable performance by actress Kathy Bates as the obsessive fan who keeps her writer hero prisoner in a remote cabin in the mountains.

Zombie-director George Romero wrote the screenplay for -and directed the adaptation of one of King's most violent stories, "The Dark Half", about an author who's pseudonym takes on a life of its own and comes back to terrorize the him and his family. As bizarre as the concept sounds, the horror and the violence is kept at fairly realistic level, which makes "The Dark Half" a shocking and unsettling film to watch.

1995 saw the release of another TV-miniseries based on a King story, namely "The Langoliers", directed by genre veteran Tom Holland. Easily one of King's strangest stories, both the book and the film(s) create a thoroughly unsettling mood and does a great job of playing with the viewer's imagination. It's a mixture of science fiction and horror rather than a pure horror story, in which a motley group of passengers on a plane mysteriously finds itself lost in what seems like a parallel universe bereft of life, and eventually discovers that they have gone through a wormhole and ended up in the past. But why is there no one around, and what is the source of the strange sounds they keep hearing?

It would be a shame to spoil too much of this highly original and imaginative time-travel story, but suffice to say there are plenty of twists and turns to keep you hooked for the duration of the film(s) total of 180 minutes.

1997's "Thinner" based on one of King's novels under the pseudonym of Richard Bachman on the other hand, is a laughable affair with ridiculous make-up effects, and only serves as an example of the growing pile of decidedly bad King adaptations made only in the hope of cashing in on King's name.

Business As Usual and A Lovecraftian Armageddon

With the turn of the century one might argue that King's heyday was over. Recovering from his infamous car accident in 1999, King announced that he was going to stop writing, apparently frustrated by the injuries he'd sustained which made it hard for him to write for longer periods of time. This however, didn't keep him from publishing the serialized novel "The Plant" online a year later, and several other books has followed since then.

Still, with the advent of both torture porn and the new wave of Japanese horror that had hit the western world, King's time as the vanguard of shocking and innovative horror was over.

The steady flow of more-or-less successful adaptations didn't stop with King's announcement to cease his writing however, and his name would still prove capable of selling tickets. Ironically, as public interest faded somewhat, the quality seemed to go up, at least compared to some of the adaptations from the 80s and the 90s.

In 2003 Lawrence Kasdan gave us the hard-hitting and all-out gross "Dreamcatcher" about a group of campers trying to survive an invasion of alien worms, In 2004 Johnny Depp starred in, but failed to save, "Secret Window", an adaptation of the short story "Secret Window, Secret Garden" from feeling like a redundant repetition of things we'd already seen, and 2006's "Desperation" gave us Ron Pearlman as an insane sheriff in a small desert town besieged by ancient evils unleashed by miners.

Though neither "Desperation" or "Dreamcatcher" explores new territory or takes many chances such as King's seminal works from the 70s and 80s did, both films are great examples of solid, traditional horror stories by an experienced craftsman who knows how to push the right buttons.

A hint of new ground, and perhaps a new flavor of King-horror, was however reached with 2007s "The Mist", that starts out as a classic King-story about a group of regular people thrown into a seemingly hopeless struggle against supernatural horrors.

The film is, for King, unusually grim and nihilistic in its portrayal of human behavior under extreme circumstance, and the it goes all the way in delivering what is easily the best, most thought-provoking, but also, curiously, the most pessimistic, Stephen King movie of the 00s; neither love, religion or good old-fashioned American fighting spirit is a match for the cosmic horrors that invade a small American town under cover of a mysterious, impenetrable mist.

The military marches in at the end of the film's two hours, but not before King and director Frank Darabont has delivered a diabolical coup de grace, a final, breathtaking panorama of Armageddon as H. P. Lovecraft might have envisioned it, leaving us, the audience, on our knees, shattered beyond repair and with no hope for salvation – or for humanity.

Closing Remarks

In many of King's best and most memorable stories, be it on the page or on the screen, we find children, particularly prepubescent boys, in the eye of the storm of the unfolding horrors. Why this unlikely choice of protagonist in books by no means meant for children? I believe this is exactly where King's genius lies. He realizes the powerful link between childhood's sense of wonder and the fear of supernatural horror. When were we ever really scared of ghost, monsters and vampires? When the world was bigger and full of wonder and mystery; when we were children on the doorstep to discovering the adult world. And King makes us remember both the joys and the thrills of those simpler times, the tender moments of friendship and sprouting sexuality, before we became jaded and cynical and began to worry more about our health or the mortgage rate than about the monsters under our beds.

To celebrate the supernatural horror is, much like Halloween, to celebrate our inner child, with all the enthusiasm, superstition and undiluted joys that comes with it. And isn't it, exactly because of that, an exquisite pleasure to relive those feelings of terror and fright?

Happy halloween.



BEYOND THE JACK O' L



JANTERN: PUMPKIN ART











Carved up by Quest007 ~ 2008













<http://fc09.deviantart.net>

SHADOWNESS



Through a Blackened Urn: A Tale of the Slenderman Mythos By Diego Martinez

Springwood, Massachusetts 1892.

“Daddy, I saw him again, the tall man with no face,” Ophelia said, her small red lips pursed into a grimace of agony.

For five nights I had watched her suffer from the racking coughs and her tiny seven year old body shake until she coughed up the blood upon her white sheets. Small speckles of crimson horror that cut me down to my soul and made me ache for her. My wife had died a little over a year ago from tuberculosis and it looked as if our daughter would suffer from the same fate. Lately she had been having dreams about him, the schoolyard monster that all the children talked about. Even when I was a child, they spoke of him. The thin man, the tall man, the Slenderman dressed in a black suit like a funeral director.

The black tie and the hollow eyes, he had no facial features to speak of but smooth deep curves that seemed to jut from his skull. Legends changed and stories grew, sometimes he was six feet tall and sometimes he was up to fifteen feet. One child would talk about his long spidery fingers and another would say that he had a multitude of arms like an octopus and he would envelope you in them. All I knew was that this demon of legend was now haunting my daughter’s dreams and through her fevered mind, he was coming to her. I told her that I would protect her and that he could not have her.

“He is just standing there sometimes, Daddy, looking at me in the room when you are sleeping. I can see him in the corner, he hides inside the walls sometimes, half his body in and half out. He can walk through them like a ghost.”

I brushed her hair and told her that I would stay with her for the night, I lit candles and sat in the old rocking chair next to the bed. A storm raged outside as the rain pounded against our roof which began to leak in the corner, I placed a bucket there. I knew I would have to venture out in the spring and fix our humble home, this place had been in my family for years, built by my grandfather, Jedediah Martin. Ophelia woke me up with the sound of her sobs.

I noticed her tossing and turning in her sleep and I shook her awake.

“Ophelia! Wake up, it is just a dream!”

“No, it isn’t! We were walking in the woods and he was so big, Daddy, he looked like a giant spider and his

arms were so long and his fingers. Oh god, they were so cold, Daddy. They hurt my bones!”

“It was just a nightmare, darling, please calm down.”

“He said he took Mommy and he’s going to take me to the place beyond the woods. Please don’t let him take me, Daddy!”

I started to sob then and took her in my arms. I vowed to never let him take her, I told her that I would sooner die.

Three nights later, she was so racked by coughs and fits that her throat began to close up and I had to breathe into her lungs. The doctor gave her a sedative but he said there was nothing more he could do for her. My entire world crumbled and I held her hand that night until the early morning when she passed on. I refused to call the mortician, I took her body into the woods and buried her myself in our private cemetery next to the plot of my wife. Someday I would join them here.

That night, the storm continued to rage, I went into town and bought a bottle of bootleg whiskey and drank until I was unconscious. The fire next to me roaring and the wind howling through the trees like the screams of children. The next day I repeated the task. I drank and drank until I vomited the contents of my stomach then I drank some more. I drank until my insides ached and I had to strength left to move. I truly yearned to die. There was nothing left in this life for me.

Then I heard the sound of a child laughing. It was Ophelia’s sweet laughter. I began to sob and looked outside. The wind raged and pulled the branches off trees. My last candle was burning down to the end of the wick and then I would be consumed by darkness. That was when I saw her in her favorite blue dress running through the woods and I followed.

“Ophelia!” I cried out, hoping beyond hope that somehow she was still alive.

Then I came to be in the middle of the woods, submerged in darkness except for the crackle of lightning which soon appeared. Trees surrounded me with a sinister edge and I felt a vague terror rise in my body. I didn’t know what I had to be afraid of but I moved slowly through the wet and tried to avoid slipping in the mud. That was when I saw it in a single flash of light, the creature in the trees. It looked like a man, or at least the main body did, the torso and head and legs but it’s arms were inhumanly long and supernaturally white. The lightning flashed again and I saw it’s face or rather the absence of one. I started to run, slipping in the mud and back towards the cabin. I could hear it moving through the trees, sliding between them and swinging with its impossibly long arms until it felt so close that I could feel a chill on my neck.

I fell into the mud.

A flash of lightning.

It stood over me, its empty dead face studying me through hollow blackened sockets, this bloodless monstrosity with no soul. It moved one of its spindly fingers over my cheek and began to caress it. Darkness again. Then a flash of lightning, it grabbed me by the arm and held it in a tight, unbreakable grip. I opened my mouth to cry out but only a weak mutter escaped my lips, “Mercy..”

Where it’s fingers touched me, I felt an impossible cold that rushed through my skin and deep down into my bones. The numbing sensation travelled up my arm and felt as if it would infect the rest of my body if it did not let go. Then suddenly it released me.

I fell back slowly into a wet patch of grass and heard it speak to me, not in words but in my mind: I will come for you too someday....

Then it was gone as soon as it came and I was alone.

I crawled back to the cabin on muddy legs and locked myself inside, nursing one last log whose embers burned softly and I slept.

When I woke the next morning, I was not sure if the events of the previous night had truly transpired or if it was just a dream but I felt strangely rejuvenated. At peace with my broken heart. I went into town and asked the local mill if they needed any extra bodies and the owner said he might have a spot opening up. I would go on living because I had no other choice but there was a comfort now. One day I would join my daughter and wife in the place beyond the wood and I would not fight it. I would accept my fate and through a blackened urn I will turn towards the Slenderman and smile and embrace my death.





<http://snook-8.deviantart.com/>

THE SLENDERMAN COMETH

ABIGAIL H.

Four kids happily ran around, all four friends and all around the ages of seven or eight. They ran around playing tag when one came with the idea to play hide and seek in the woods. All the others agreed, so they started to the woods. Once all four were hidden... shrieks filled the air and birds flew from the tree tops as the sun had begun to set over the low, hidden horizon. All had settled and a terrible scratching sound could be heard. Then all went silent. At the entrance of the dark woods, the sun gently shining against the trees, there was a man. A very tall, thin man in a black with white striped suit... his skin was a pale grey and he was bald as it seemed. There was no face there, only a flat surface, and he waved a finger above where his lips would be. As if to say, Come and play in the woods.

It was the first month of school and everyone had found what others may call, 'clicks'. Or in this case, groups of popularity rates. There were three girls outside and sitting on a picnic table. Talking happily to one another, their names were the following. The Blonde was Alice. She has the bright blue eyes and lovely figure everyone wanted. The Dirty blonde was Alexandria, she was the same, only her eyes were blue green and she was tall, thin, smart, and very strong. And the little brown haired girl was Alana. She was short, thin, smart, lovely, and had sparkling brown eyes that shined happily. And there was a new girl. She was short, small, thin, frail, and had wavy blonde hair with blue grey eyes, and she could be rated as a 'nerd' or 'outcast' of the school. She was new and wanted to have friends. Thinking that the three girls were nice, she went over with a warm smile and waved.

"Hello, I'm Mallery and I'm new." She said kindly. Alice grimaced at her and frowned, giving an evil look. "And I should care why exactly?" She asked, talking in the accent of a Valley Girl. Mallery looked down at her feet, hands folded in front of her while she shrugged her little shoulders, her gaze down casted to the ground under her small feet. "I dunno... I just wanted to know if you wanted to be friends with me." Alana, being the nice one of the three, smiled kindly and opened her mouth to speak, but of course, Alice had to say something first. She placed a hand over Alana's mouth, silencing her before she even spoke. "Alright then, if you want to be our friend, you should camp in the woods tonight." She said warmly to her. Alexandria looked at her with wide green eyes. "You're kidding right?" She asked, but was also silenced by Alice's hand. Mallery looked hopeful, a warm smile bright on her face and her eyes shining. "Okay! I'll see you in the morning then." She said kindly to them.

Soon, the little one skipped off to talk to the teachers like she normally did. Alana glared daggers at Alice, who looked to be smug with her smirk dancing on her face. "You're a real jerk." Alana spat at her, a frown burned deep on her face. Alice only waved her hand, pretty pink nails shining in the sun's rays. "SlenderMan isn't real, even if he was; she's all bone and no organs." She said with a growl to her voice.

"If she's hurt, it's all your fault then." Alexandria said bitterly before she and Alana got up and walked away. Alice only rolled her bright blue eyes and chewed on gum, ignoring their words as if they were simple, annoying flies bugging her.

~

Later that night, Mallery went out into the woods with a flashlight and a sleeping bag. A warm, happy smile dancing on her lips as she sat near a clearing. Long, tall, thin trees were scattered all along the plush green



grass which lay perfectly spread against the soft ground. The air was chilled, as if there was something terribly wrong in her timing. She snuggled in her bag and looked around for a moment before something caught her eyes. She looked towards it with furrowed brows, a concerned look on her face as her eyes locked on the figure. It was a human shape. "Hello?" She asked over, her voice shaking a little in fear as to what this person might want from her. Blinking and rubbing her eyes, she looked to him again, only to see it had stepped a few feet closer. Blinking in disbelief, she blinked once more. Only to no avail, it kept getting closer. Then she ducked and hid in her bag, "It's not real...I know it's just my mind playing tricks." Before she could look out to see SlenderMan leaning over her, there was silence...then a scream. The girl was hanging in the tree, twenty meters up with all her organs removed. Everything was gone from within her and she was just lying there. There was a long, sharp tree branch wedged deeply in her chest cavity, her head was gently tilted to the side. All life drained from her now pale and dull, washed out blue grey eyes which now seemed like a lifeless dull, forever gone grey color. Her mouth was slightly parted, a dark dried line of scarlet dripped there. There was a long trail of blood under her, it was all scarlet, and not a single trace of her organs were found...

~

It was early morning, the sun just over the horizon and cops surrounded the woods. A screaming mother with tears staining her cheeks was crying out for her child. Her only child, "Mallary!" Long brown locks of hair fell over her face as she screamed for her child, the tears still running down her face as she cried. She screamed over and over again, struggling to get to where they had the body. But she was restrained by others while the father was crying on the ground, screaming to the Gods for why this had happened to his only darling. The only thing that lit his world, his poor six year old daughter. So innocent, so sweet, so cute... all was gone. Alana, Alice, and Alexandria all stood there with wide eyes. Alana had tears running down her cheeks, face flushed in

pain for the lost little girl. "You said he wasn't real, you lied! You let a little girl die!" Alana yelled, reaching over to beat the mess out of Alice, who stood there shocked. Alexandria stepped in and kept Alana from harming the other, soothing her silently. "It's okay—" Before she finished, Alana yelled. "No! It's not 'okay'! We let a little girl die in the woods!" She said, her voice shaking, anger burning in her eyes while a dark glare filled those hate filled eyes. Alice spoke, her voice shaking and gravelly. "We have to find who did this... SlenderMan, we're finding him tonight, and we're killing him." She said, looking to the others, the threat of tears brimmed her blue eyes that now seemed fogged by shame and guilt. "Like hell we are!" Alana shouted at her, reaching over and slapping her hard across the face, leaving a small line of blood. She had cut her cheek during the slap, seeing as she often had her nails done.

~~~~~

It was midnight and Alice was throwing pebbles at Alana's window, telling her to get ready to find SlenderMan. Alexandria was in her house with her, trying to keep the rage in her instead of harming anyone around her. The two slid out the window and down the side of the house, their eyes not meeting Alice's as they walked to the woods silently. Not a single word passed between them until they stood before the dark wood's entrance. "Alright, let's go where she was." Alexandria said bravely, stepping forwards and holding their hands, dragging them along in after her. Their footfalls echoed silently, the trees rustled as they pushed branches and limbs out of the way, a few webs blocking their path, but Alexandria and Alana were determined to kill SlenderMan. Once in the spot where Mallery was at, they set their things down and looked around. Clicking on flashlights and scanning the land that surrounded them. The land that SlenderMan knew far too well, the one that they might pass and die in, their eyes stayed narrowed as they scanned around, frowns burned deep on their faces.

~SlenderMan's Point of view~

Hiding behind a tree in the far distance, his hand slightly peeking out, just barely, and only long thin pale fingers could be seen there. Half of his body was shown, half his 'face' stared at them, what would seem like a glare emitted from him as he stood there. If he could, he would have a twisted, evil, dark grin painted and burned to his face. Soon, a light flashed on him and a girl screamed out, "There he is!" SlenderMan stepped out and began making his way to the three young girls, pushing branches and such aside.

~~~~~

As the demon neared them and was soon three yards away, the three girls jumped up and bolted. They ran as fast as they could, scrapes covering their hands and arms, their ankles and legs. Once in the safety of the clearing, they panted and bent over, hands on their knees as they tried to breathe in, all the air gone from their beings. "I-I'm scared!" Alana cried, but was given a warm smile by Alexandria. "Don't worry, we'll be fine!" She said kindly, but then...out of nowhere, she dropped to the ground with a huff and began to slowly go backwards. Her nails dug deep in the ground and she screamed, thrashing and looking back with wide eyes to see a long black snake like object drag her back. It dug deep in her ankle, cutting open blood veins and arteries. Screaming, Alana grabbed her hands and yanked her back, but to no avail. Alexandria slipped from her grip and was dragged out, the screaming soon ended and Alice with Alana ran for dear life. Once they neared the entrance, they slowed their steps, but that was bad since SlenderMan was still near them. SlenderMan snatched Alice by her legs and dragged her back, but Alana didn't let him take her, not without a fight. She held on tight to the other, only to be shoved off by Alice, the one she was trying to save. "Go, now!" She screamed, tears trailing her face. Traumatized, Alana ran, blood covering her now. Once out of the woods, she ran faster until she reached a police station, she began to tell them everything, but they accused her of being crazy and lying. So she was sent out.

~~~~~



The sun was rising once again, over the hills and tree tops. Meaning it was morning and SlenderMan wasn't out anymore for fear of light. She slipped into the woods to find them, and find them she did. In the same place the police had found Mallary. As Alana wondered in, she saw them... hanging in trees like lifeless dolls. In this case, they looked like such. She stepped up to see Alexandria first. Alexandria was upside down, her chest was embedded with the branch, and so were her hands and legs. The wood thick and sharp, like stakes in a vampire's chest like in the movies or books, they were splintering and could be seen like little pricks in Alexandria's fingertips. Showing that she had struggled to get free before she was stabbed and her organs were stolen from her entire being. She winced at the sight and sniffled, tears streaming her now dusty face, leaving little clean trails as the tears traveled and rolled down, falling from her face and to the dusted ground where the puddles of blood lay in thick scarlet dried layers. "I-I'm so sorry."

She murmured, rubbing her now lifeless and pale cheek, only to get dark, yet still wet, crimson all over her fingertips. Alexandria's mouth was agape and her eyes were still wide and open fully. After looking through her dull and lifeless eyes, she could see a slumped body in the reflection. Swiveling around, she saw a headless body on the ground. Slowly walking over with hesitant steps, she looked down and saw that the spine, organs, and rib cage were removed cleanly, not a single part in sight on the ground near the decapitated body. A frown crossed her face and she looked around, only to look up when she felt a drop of blood fall on her forehead. She looked up only to see something that would stay in her mind for the rest of her life. It was a head with a branch sticking out of the broken mouth that's jaw had been torn open to make room for the splintering wooden branch that was shoved deep in her broken jaw and through the back of her head, piercing the skin open and pushing in the trunk of the tree. The spine and rib cage still intact to Alice's head, not a single bone missing from the line, with wide eyes, she looked to the body once more. She saw that the arms and legs were broken, the bone sticking out and bleeding deeply, fragments of the bone lying on the ground. The wound now festering a little from being dried and exposed for so very long, seeing as it was only midnight when this event unfaithfully was undone before them. Her throat was slit open in large gashes, looking like a bear clawed at her, and then bit deep into her neck. Almost like a dagger was used for the slaughter of poor Alice Maria. She looked deep in the puddle of blood to see SlenderMan right behind her, staring at her with a shadow looming from him and covering part of her.

Alana stared in the blood, her face still streaked with tears that seemed as if they burned her skin open. Turning around with a glare, she bravely stood to the demonic being that killed her two closest friends, the only two who welcomed her and never went behind her back like many had. The only two who cared enough to help her out of the shadows. The only two, who truly understood her for herself and not the mask she hid behind at times. "You monster, you killed them! What have they ever done to you? Nothing! You're just a self-centered sadistic, cruel, heartless monster God made the mistake of letting Lucifer have! You good for nothin-," Before she finished, her mouth was covered fully with a large, pale hand. If SlenderMan had a face, he'd be sneering at her, a frown deeply burned in his face while his brows furrowed, his eyes would be narrowed and daggers would be shoved into her eye sockets. Alana kept her eyes on his emotionless, flat surface of a face. After a moment or so, pausing and getting her things planned in her mind. She looked around with her eyes, hardly moving, as if frozen in place. Then, like a scared rabbit, she jumped up and took off down the woods, running as fast as her thin, pale legs would carry her. She didn't look back, already knowing he was following her in a quick, slinking motion.

Alana wasn't even near the wood's breaking when she felt something grip around her torso, digging in deep under her skin. She let out a scream, deep scarlet red blood made its way out her mouth and down her chin.

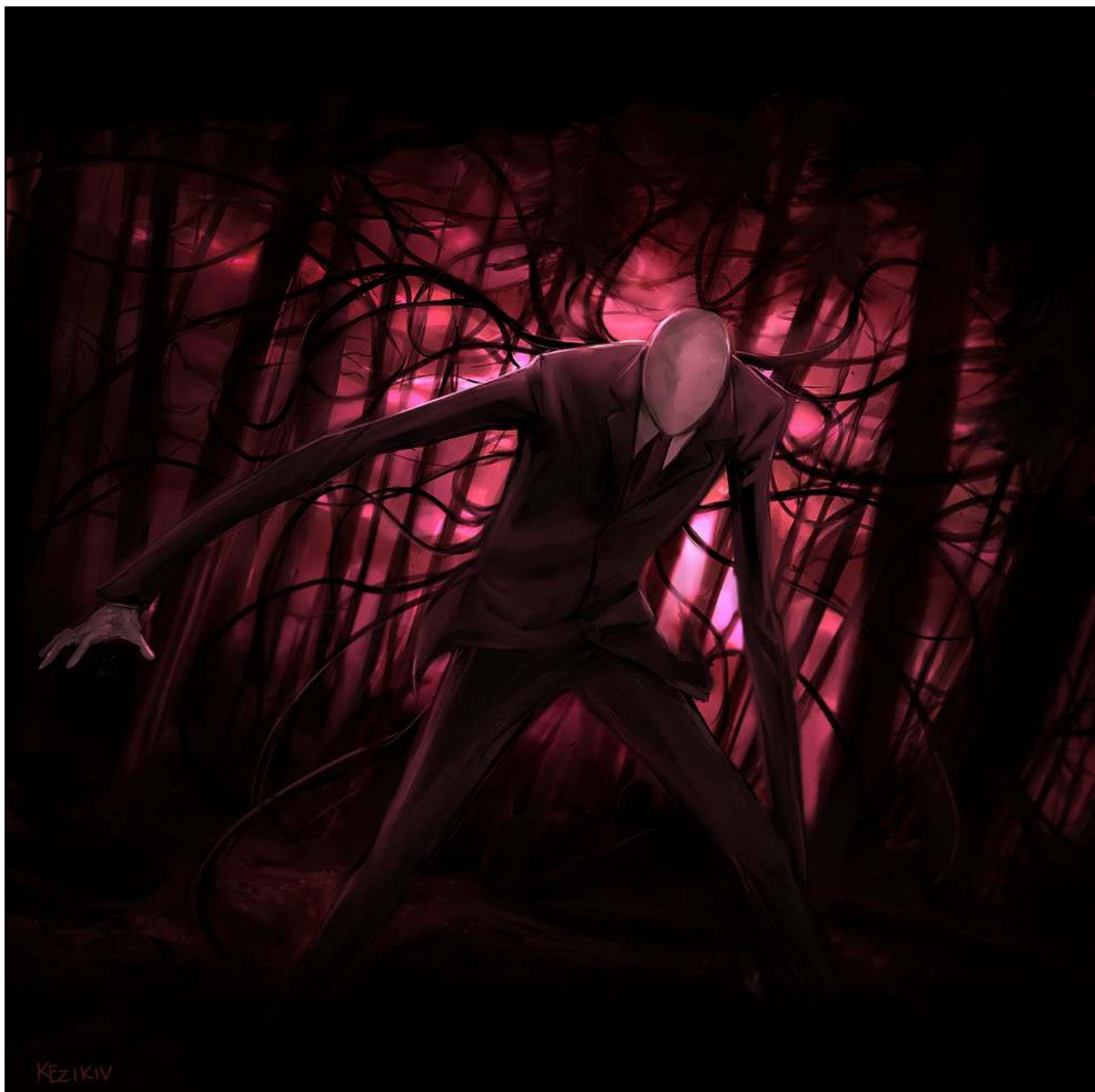
With a hesitant pause, she looked over her shoulder to see him standing about twelve yards away. Suddenly, she was being dragged backwards, her heels digging in the ground. But to no avail, she was being dragged back more and more. She grabbed a tree trunk and clung to it with all force, her arms shaking while the elongated appendage from his upper back to the left of his shoulder blade dug into her stomach. There was a splash. Looking down, Alana could see that her stomach area was torn seven inches deep, blood poured out and onto the green ground of the Earth under her, the once plush green grass was covered in crimson. "Leave me alone!" She yelled, but that hardly helped, he kept pulling, and kept pulling. Soon enough, there was a snap, and her bright eyes slowly dulled. All color drained from her face as she slowly slid down the tree, falling limp. Her body was split in half, blood gushed out in deep scarlet red, covering the ground around her. SlenderMan walked over and looked down at her, shaking his head as if to say; Tsk, tsk.

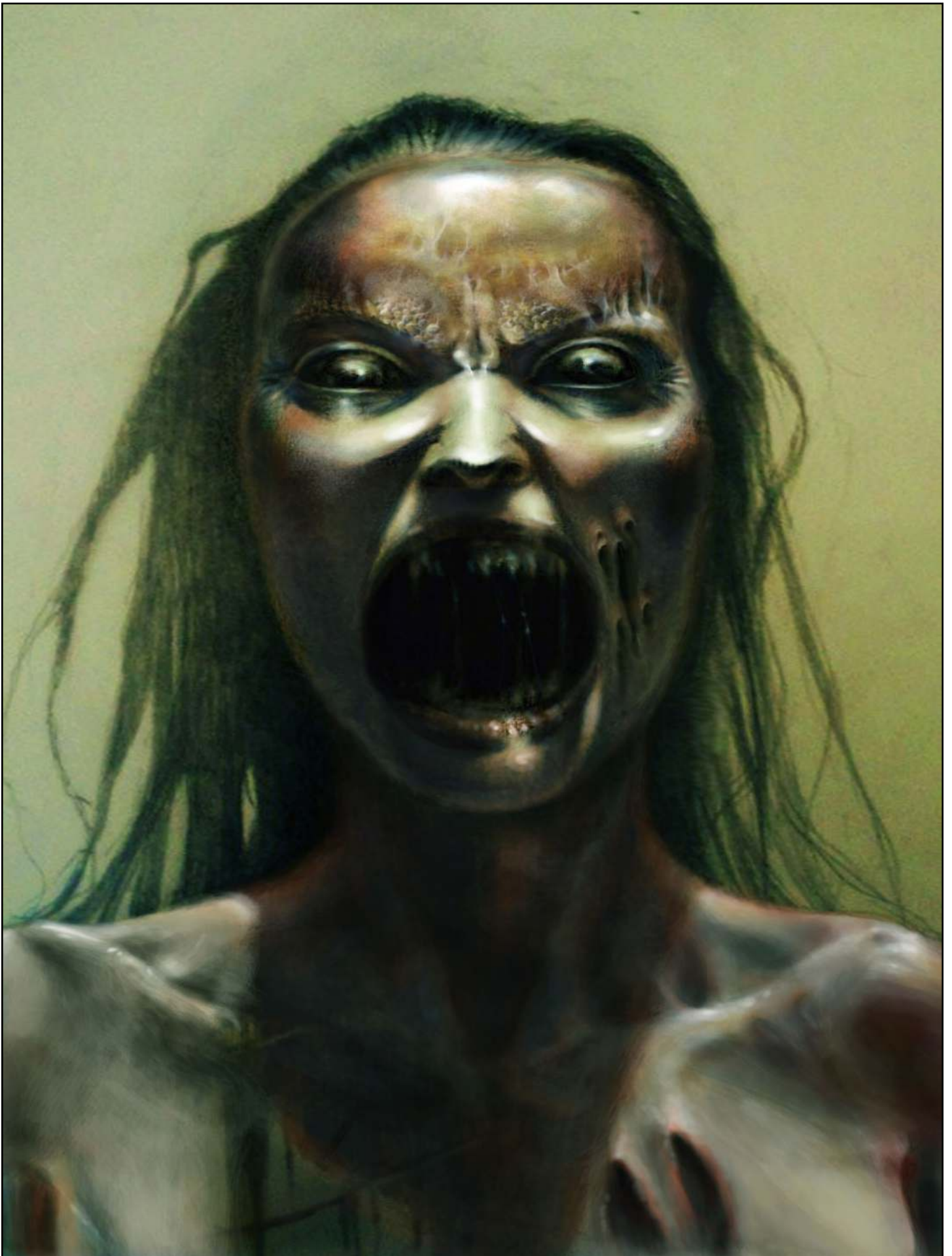
That was the last of the four girls and SlenderMan took her, lifting both halves. He broke the branches and stabbed her in the tree. Her top part first, he lifted her up and hung her there. Almost like she was on a cross, he stabbed it through her hands, leaving large gashes. He then set it on her torso, but something shocking happened... Her spine was broken in the way that left her alive, yet close to death. "W-why?" She asked, looking up at him. SlenderMan shook his head, if he could, he would sigh in anger. After a moment, he shoved his hand forwards, gripping her lower jaw and jerked his hand back, ripping her lower jaw off her face. Screaming, he silenced her at last...shoving the huge splintery wood in her mouth and through the back of her head like he had done to her friend, Alice. She hung limp, her eyes bleeding out, as if her tears turned bitter and stained red. SlenderMan did the same to her legs, hanging them on a different tree. He began the process of taking the organs, stealing them from the helpless, dead, unforgiving girl.

~Several Years Later~

It's been several years later and the woods were off limits to all children. If something were lost there, a parent would have to go and retrieve it for them. Almost all had forgotten, or tried to forget, what happened to the poor five girls that went in the woods. The air was crisp; the sign that fall was coming soon. The grass dull from the season changes. Two young boys were playing in the backyard that had a large fence, protecting them from the woods. The youngest was only seven and the oldest was nine. They were passing a white, new, fresh ball back and forth, laughing and giggling, having a good old time. But, the nine year old hit it too hard and it flew past the gate. "I'll get mom." He said, seeing as they were young, they didn't understand the dangers of the woods. The silly seven year old waved a hand, dismissing the idea. "It's Okay! I'll go and get it for us! Be back in a minute." He said, then took off, slipping between a gap in the planks, and started to the woods. He slid through the entrance and ran down, looking for the ball, not taking in the world around him. Once the lovely white ball was found, he bent over and lifted it up, brushing dust off of it. With a smile, he turned around to run back, but stopped dead in his tracks. He was lost in the woods. There was a rusting...then a scratching...then a snap. The seven year old looked around, fearful of what was going on. "H-hello?" He asked timidly as he held the ball. There was a shadow looming over the little one, he slowly looked over and up, only to see a tall, faceless man in a black and white striped suit. The little one's eyes grew wide, the bright emerald pools he used of his irises looked at him, eyes glazed over. The ball fell limp from his hands and dropped to the ground, landing with only a single bounce on the ground. Time slowed to a crawl and all was still for several moments. The boy forgot he had been holding in a breath, his lungs refusing to release the air as it stayed trapped. The silence was broken with a splatter. Crimson splashed to the ground and lay scattered on the ground. The boy fell to the ground, tumbling over and lying limp on his side, eyes still wide. There was a large, thick, splintering hunk of wood deep in his throat. Nowhere near his mouth, but in his neck, blood leaked out and his organs were soon stolen, and SlenderMan was gone...hidden in the woods until a child returned.

The mother and father were searching, keeping their nine year old inside the house. The little one looked out from the window, scanning all around, both hands on the glass of the window as he watched. Silence was broken with a blood curdling scream that echoed through the woods. The nine year old boy's eyes grew wide as he could see in a little clear patch, his mother on the dusty ground, holding her dead son while the father cursed Lucifer and SlenderMan, though; no one knew it was SlenderMan. The nine year old looked to the tree tops from where he was in his room on the second floor. He saw nothing but birds fly. Then, he looked down at the entrance and saw SlenderMan standing there, waving a long, pale, thin index finger. As if to say, Come and Play in the woods.





<http://marielasbleiz.deviantart.com/>

# **DIMINISHING SIGHT**

## **JOSEPH J PATCHEN**

Though her eyes are gone, a bright pinpoint of light emanates from deep within her skull, expanding out through each socket. She lies on the floor, on her back, motionless, with the hint of a wry smile on her lips.

As blood trickles from her nose and ears, the light pulses quickly at first, then, after a few moments, gradually flickers slower and slower as it begins to dim. The smile now grows into place without even a twitch touching her fingertips.

I know she has been dead, but now she is finally at peace.

Daylight is yet to break. I'm certain the sun will not quell the sirens of the police, fire and ambulance. They are destined to fill the air. From all the commotion, I can only guess mine wasn't the only family split apart tonight. I just wonder how many monsters passed through this town and where the catalyst for their creation has gone.

I dare not pull the knife from her chest - not that it would change a thing. Funny, in spite of it all, of her lying there in the full throws of death, how she looks as sweet and beautiful as the day I first saw her.

My explanation to 9-1-1 goes without pause or question. Even the dispatcher warns me from withdrawing the knife I plunged into my wife's heart. The authorities will be here in an hour or two as tonight has turned out to be 'rather busy'.

I want a drink, a strong drink, but something straight usually makes me puke. Funny, I know I am going to puke anyway when this sinks in, probably before I collapse and have the breakdown I thought I was having during the night. I should just have that drink.

Downing two whiskeys, my thoughts wander to my wife and the blood framing her. Two more whiskeys and my nerves are still not settled. In fact I can't even taste what is now burning the back of my throat. I never thought I would ever say this, but boy am I glad we never had children.

My front door practically hemorrhages its hinges from the pounding. Now the doorbell; now both. I don't own a gun and the largest knife I have is standing straight up in my wife's chest. Who is it? Don't the police announce themselves? What if it's that guy or someone else he's infected?

I grab the only heavy thing I can find: a dictionary. It should smack someone's head real good or else I'll just throw it and run, hoping it can bore that thing to death.

"Who is it?"

The pounding and doorbell are frantic.

“Who is it?”

The banging doesn't stop.

“Who the...?” I fling the door open with the book firmly in right hand, raised high above my head. I almost throw my shoulder out when I realize it's my neighbor, Betty. The dictionary sails over her head, tumbling end over end until it reaches the end of my walkway, knocking my mailbox over. Good throw. I bet I couldn't do that again if I tried.

“John,” she's hysterical. She didn't even notice the dictionary or the crash just a few feet away. I get the full impact of sound now that the door is open. As I try to calm Betty, I hear the full impact of this night; the sirens, the crashes, the glass breaking, gunshots, screams...

Her story mirrors mine. A scary movie on the television; a spouse handing out Halloween candy, happily admiring the cute costumes of the neighborhood children; waving and shouting 'hello' to the parents congregated by the road. A picture perfect, greeting card scene.

Then slowly, over the course of the evening, as more and more children stopped by, the behavior changed, the actions became more mechanical and devoid of emotion. Her husband spent a lot of time in between doorbell rings rubbing his eyes and complaining. My wife kept washing hers out and complaining. There was something in them: they were full of goo; their vision blurred until finally they couldn't see at all, as if they were blind. Then it all changed.

A bright white light replaced their eyes. The light was hypnotic at first, then grew to a searing white blaze. They could see again and their voices became as gravelly and full of hate as the demonic voices on the TV. Dishes, glasses, windows, chairs were thrown and smashed; all broken. Betty was the object of this fury. In my home, it was me. Violence with such strength as neither of us has ever seen, fueled the relentless attacks.

The struggle raged room to room. I told Betty my wife was attempting to bite my flesh - my face my arms --- finally I grabbed a knife and well, she could see. She didn't want to; her own husband lay on their living room rug. She had pointed their shotgun at him, but despite his raging abuse, she couldn't pull the trigger. He rushed her and ended up impaling himself on the barrel. He is on his side, run through by the gun.

She is in shock, covered in sweat, tears and blood. She sat in a corner crying and screaming for hours; her two children hunkered down in the attic. I told her the police were on the way and I would accompany her home to get her children.

Dawn is breaking and the streets are full of debris - useful and decorative debris, the quiet possessions of quiet people, strewn and irreparable. Halloween bags and plastic buckets in the forms of pumpkins and ghosts lay torn and smashed with candy everywhere.

There are no bodies.

As we run over to Betty's house, we continue to compare notes. She too caught a glimpse of the small child dressed in a World War I uniform, his mask being an actual child's gas mask. Scary enough, he walked with some of the neighborhood children but seemed separate. Standing to the rear of the group, he never shouted 'trick or treat' or held out his bag for candy. He only seemed to stare, and when my wife made eye contact, she stopped for a moment. I thought it was the mask. Betty did too, of her husband's reaction.



When I saw the child I wondered who he belonged to. In my mind, I matched all the parents and children outside; but I was sidetracked by my wife's burning eyes and lost sight of him as he left our house.

Betty, too.

When we arrived through her open door, Betty ran up the stairs, calling for her son and daughter. I turned into her living room on my left and saw a vast pool of blood mixed with dust or powder and a rifle buried within. Terry, Betty's husband, appeared to be no more. No body, no bones, just wet dust. Has the same happened to my wife?

Shielding the three, I direct them out of the house, convincing everyone to wait at my place for the police. Since my wife is lying on the kitchen floor I can keep the door closed, so the already fragile kiddies can calm themselves.

At ages ten and eight respectively, they cling to their mother like an invasive growth; never taking their eyes from her. All three are making loud sounds, nothing intelligible except for the fear.

I make sure everyone sits on the couch, trying to quiet them. With the promise of some soda, I dash into the kitchen to find my wife's body intact and in the same position as when I left her. Dropping ice cubes and almost breaking glasses, I pour the drinks and grab a tray. I wonder why Terry disintegrated - as if I can reason anything from this night.

Starting to make my way back through the door I feel someone looking at me, at the back of my head. I turn and drop everything as my wife stands three feet away from me with a broad smile on her face. Her eyes are still empty sockets and no light shines within.

The knife is still in her, framed by dried blood. She raises her arm and points a finger at me. All she says is 'Happy Halloween' before crumbling to dust before my eyes. More glass is breaking. I rush out to the living room and Betty and her children are gone. In their places are three more piles of dust.

"Well, there you go officer. Anything differ from what you've already heard tonight?"

"Not particularly. You're remarkably calm."

"Numb. I'm numb."

"Well, either way, the Coroner will be out to pick up the remains. Please don't disturb anything and we'll see you next Halloween."

"Next Halloween?"

"Oh, yes, you have shown remarkable stability in all this carnage and that will be useful for us."

"What?"

"You see, we hit our quota for this year. Since this is only the first year we've claimed souls in this manner, we had a hunch we might have to come back another couples of times to gather the more heroic and stable ones."



# CINNAMON STICKS AND LITTLE BEASTS

## KEITH FINK

### RILEY'S MORNING:

The club is called Absalom.

I received an invitation to the soft open of a club named 'Absalom'. There was no return address on the envelope. And it was crisp and cream colored on the outside. It also smelt of forest and fresh pine.

It had the letter V melted into the crimson wax that sealed the invitation.

I hadn't heard much about Absalom. I knew that silver spoon groups from LSU in Burbank and Oakland and even Santa Ana were planning on hitting the club when it opened in a month. It seemed like the place to be, for those of you who aren't certifiable. I'm more of a loner. And going outside can only lead to certain disaster. No, I'm much better off inside these four walls.

I'll creep under my bed completely naked scratching my forearms like a fucking tick. Some days I completely lose form and go ape shit. Reality and I have an uneasy truce, and I would do well not to violate that. I self medicate when shit like this happens. This is usually in the form of lithium and bath salts and occasionally some H. But I still feel the insects crawling and needling under my skin. And then there's the bulging heap of muscle and tissue that's knotted and tied together underneath the epidermis, which ultimately ended up leaving bits of my body discolored and blistering with infection. Then I go to see my reflection in the mirror and I see my face covered with maggots and spiders. I'm a living corpse, a zombie hungry for gore. The vultures are always a step away.

I pretend that I'm stable and I think it's sometime in the afternoon. I've been in trance for the last week or so. And now I come to realize that I'm going through pretty severe nicotine withdraw. So I decide to plunder through my entire shit-bag of an apartment. I open kitchen drawers, I overturn my mattress, I dig through my sparse closet and I end up finding a pack near the shitter. I thank my luck stars and then realize that I only have two miserable non-menthols left.

These things happen I suppose.

I light up and soon the fresh chemical stabilizers fully flush through my veins. I feel joy and goodwill and even far reaching empathy and I'm suddenly aware that I look like shit. My jeans are old and faded and torn, and far too loose. My shirt is navy, made with cheap cotton, smeared with sweat and blood. And I'm not wearing shoes. My eyes are sunken in and my hair resembles messy douchbag hair. I haven't shaved in a few days, though I couldn't tell you how many.

Time passes and I grow numb. I look around the dump that I'm proud to call my own. The wallpaper is faded and yellow, peeling at the seams. I guessed it's probably leftover from the 1950's. The walls are rotting away and the termites are probably having the time of their lives. My carpet is old and stained with dried vomit and semen. It's warm and stale in the summer. I feel as though I can't breathe most days, but then I go for a cold bubble bath with baking soda and Valium.

And yes, it does help. Fuck you.

After sitting on the cool bathroom tile for a few minutes I put the last of the butt out on my forearm and then I light my last cinnamon stick. I walk through the mess, filth, clutter, and dead insects on a mission to find a pair of matching shoes. And eventually, I find some old cowboy boots that I stole from a department store some time ago. The funny thing is I didn't really want them anyway.

Cowboy boots make me nostalgic for the Wild West. Back when you could shoot a man for glancing at you the wrong way. Draw! Bang! You're dead.

But the West had lizards. You could watch lizards in the heat crawling around looking for nothing in particular. And that's fine with me. Reptiles are my friends. Anybody who extends their friendship to reptiles is very wise. They'll inherit the Earth after the apocalypse comes and I for one will want to be on good terms with them.

I lift my pillow, faded and worn. Underneath is my beloved, my friend, my mentor, my *Glock*. I stroke the black muzzle with my index finger and then I begin to softly sing the national anthem. Proud to be an American this one is. And

I solemnly swear to my little beast that I will be nothing but faithful. "Till death do we part.

I leave the apartment and it is in fact afternoon. My little beast is suspended between my belt and the small of my back, snug and warm. And the sun is colliding with my cornea and it makes me sneeze. I check my pocket and I have ten dollars and a nickel in one and four dollars in the other. I guess I can work with that. I need sunglasses though. The sunlight is not to be trusted.

As I cross the street, I'm careful to step in between the white lines on the crosswalk. If I step on a white line, then my entire family might die. I can't be completely certain of this however. But why take the chance? So I take my time and cars honk and I smile with my discolored teeth, never breaking eye contact.

I get the finger.

I continue to walk to a shadowy gas station nearby.

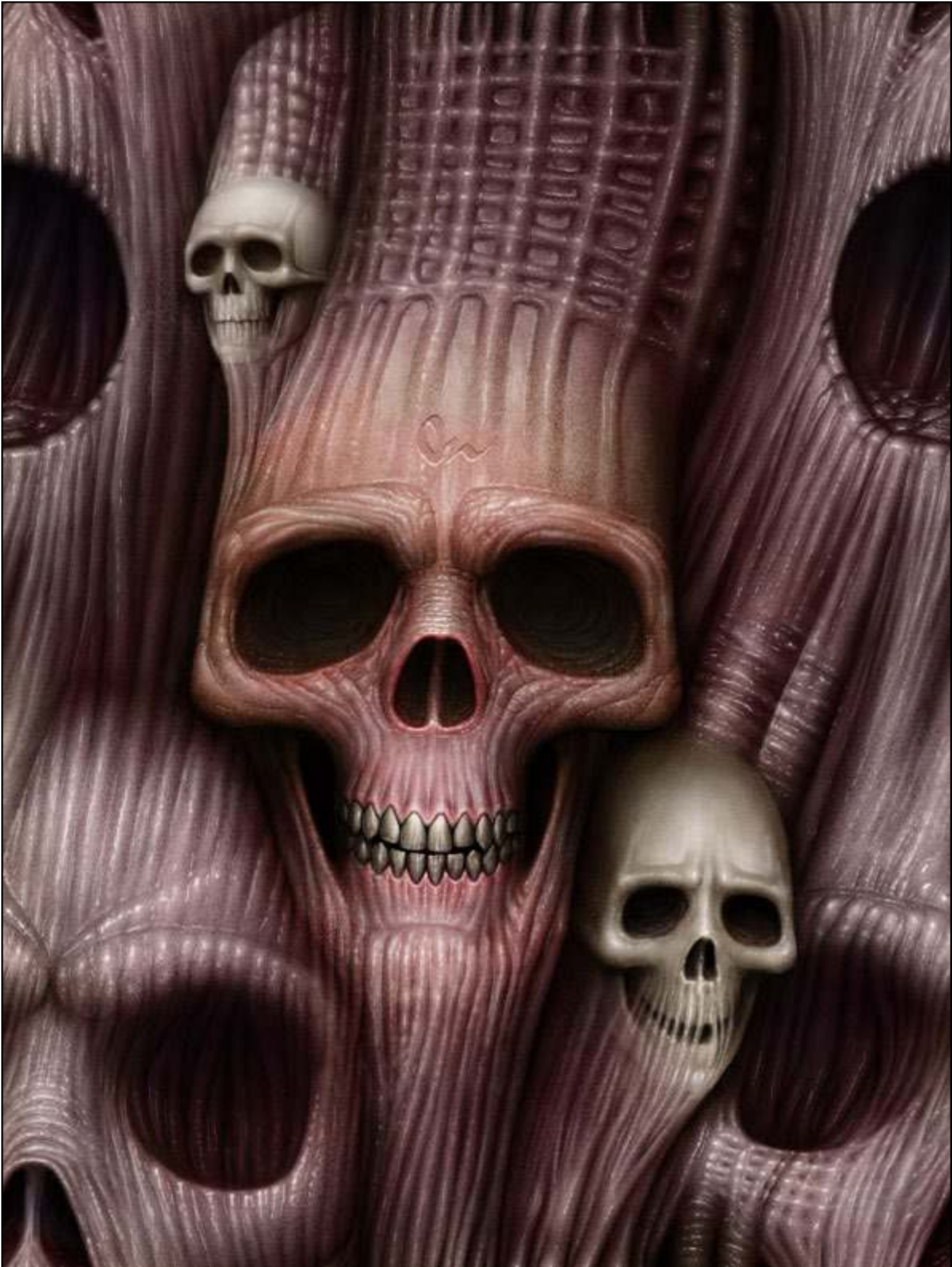
The place is wonderful. It's cheap and run down and it smells like spoiled milk. I walk in and overhead I hear *Wonderwall* playing. I look around and find usual gas station items beer, porn, soda, OTC pain killers, energy drinks, condoms and stale *Krispy Kreme* doughnuts. So I wind up standing by the sunglasses display and I'm all nonchalant and discreetly trying on some of the sunglasses. (I wasn't going to 'buy' a pair.) Anyway, I was very smooth.

Then I see the fat man. He's probably 280, and he's behind the counter reading a celebrity gossip magazine with Jessica Biel on the cover. And of course, he has the mandatory half-eaten sandwich complete with an XL diet soda. He's balding and he reminds me of tweedle-dee.

He scratches his belly and belches. I then realized that I might actually enjoy stealing from this fella. I put the silver aviator sunglasses in my back pocket and my hands start twitching with the rush of excitement. Then I steal a pack of pink bubble gum.

Finally though, I bought a large blue slurpee with a white dog on the cup. I also get a pack of menthols at the counter. A man has his rights. So I underpay and tweedle-dee doesn't notice. I put the sunglasses on in the store with the tag still on and I smile at him before leaving.





# Last Best Friend

## by Jeff Gardiner

“Yes,” cried Jake, pumping the air with his fist. “The dirty deed is done. Easy - just went up to the boss and said, ‘Job’s shit, pay’s shit and you’re shit’, then walked out. Been wanting to do that for years. Oh yeah.” Jake jumped on Alan’s lap, which was painful as Jake was a solid, stocky young man. Alan was slighter and more easily bruised.

“Now it’s your turn, sonny Jim, my lad,” Jake coaxed. “Come on, I’ve done it. No time like the present,” and he threw him his mobile. “Phone your boss, now and I dare you to call him an asshole.”

Alan took up the challenge, spurred on by his best friend’s charisma and completed the conversation with his now ex-boss, which terminated with the ‘c’ word. The pair giggled inanely and opened two cans of lager to celebrate their newfound freedom.

They’d been planning this for years. This was their dream: their *raison d’etre*. Money earned working extra shifts, usually spent getting drunk, was now going to pay for a year of travelling around the world to India, Thailand, Australia, California, Morocco, and finishing off with a fortnight in Ibiza ‘on the pull’. Now both had resigned their jobs nothing stopped them and to celebrate they would begin their adventure with a relaxing beach holiday in Crete, then go on to India from there.

Jake and Alan had been best friends since middle school; they’d played in the same football team, shared the same taste in music and films, and even a flat. They came as a pair and knew each other so well, that friends of theirs always felt like they were on the outside looking in onto this exclusive clique of two. For a little while they even shared the same girlfriend, Melinda. She left after Alan could no longer tolerate her, quite literally, ‘coming between them’.

“Of course Crete is the birth place of Zeus,” the travel agent told them. She was a lady in her forties who wore too much make up.

“Oh, yeah,” Jake responded. “You mean like ‘The cat in the hat he shat on the mat’ and all that stuff?”

“Excuse me?” the woman enquired looking perplexed.

“What the hell are you talking about, you dickhead?” Alan asked, swapping a look of incredulity with the travel agent.

“You know, Doctor Seuss,” Jake insisted, refusing to give up on his point. “The silly books with pictures and rhymes: ‘The Cat in the Hat’, the Grinch and all that malarkey. We always used to read them.”

“Yeah, when we were five, you knob.”

“Um ... no, I don’t think so,” the woman answered politely if uncertainly. “I meant Zeus as in the Greek god. Of course El Greco was born there too.”

“What the lizard?” asked Jake. He was interrupted by Alan who pretended to clip him round the ear.

“No, not Gecko, you muppet. Greco, the painter.”

The travel agent stared pitifully as Alan continued ticking off Jake as if he was a naughty three year old. It was of course all part of their routine and repertoire as self-styled comedians, or at least the type of comedian whose most appreciative audience is himself and his best friend.

“I must apologise for Jake here. He has a congenital mental condition. Actually we were Siamese twins connected by the head, but when they separated us I got all the brains.”

“God, if I was your brother, I’d top myself.”

When the travel agent realised it was humour she smiled politely and decided not to mention anything about the Minotaur.

They were taken to their villa a few miles west of Iraklion in a coach with no air conditioning. Their apartment was just one room with a sink and grill on the left, and a double bed which sunk in the middle taking up the rest

of the space. At the back was a toilet and shower.

“You can have the floor, I’m not sleeping next to you, farting and snoring all night.” Alan jumped on the bed and spread himself out in a star shape to make his point clear.

“Me? What about you scratching your goolies all the time, leaving pubes everywhere? And you do know how to use a shower, don’t you?” Jake retorted.

“Oh, ha-de-ha.”

“Hey, why do farts smell, anyway?”

“Dunno.”

“For the benefit of the deaf.”

Alan rolled his eyes. “Okay then, if buttercups are yellow what colour are hiccups?”

“Burple,” Jake said tonelessly. “I’ve got one. How do you make a hormone?”

“Give up.”

“Don’t pay her!” Jake mimed a drum-roll and took the victory.

They discovered the swimming pool was being renovated and out of action so they put on their trunks and toddled off to the beach, which was actually a fifty-minute walk, not the five as printed in the brochure. Once there, the fun was unending. They went parasailing, hired jet-skis, did some snorkelling, took surreptitious photographs of topless beauties and climbed some nearby rocks to check out the caves, ignoring the hand-written sign aimed at English tourists: “Please to abstain from mountaineering this sinister cliffs”.

Of course they did not abstain. Whilst exploring the said caves, they met a small group of adventurous girls, slightly drunk, who had egged each other on. After two minutes chatting, Alan seduced one of them into a dark recess, where Jake, who was left to talk politely with the remaining girls, tried his best to ignore his friend’s hairy arse rising and falling a few yards away. The girls waited patiently and with some considerable giggling until the couple got up again red-faced and grinning. Now bored with exploring, Jake signalled to Alan and they walked the girls back to the beach.

The two friends returned to their villa to wash and change before going back out for some local cuisine. They both ended up eating chicken and chips then drank the free raki, having consumed half a dozen beers each and a bottle of local retsina wine that tasted of pine needles. After another short walk along the coast they came to a lively resort with beachside discos and nightclubs, where they continued drinking, before chatting up some ladies, then dancing until they felt queasy. When Alan expressed his desire to ‘have jiggy-jiggy’ with one particular peroxide blonde Jake got a bit funny with him, but Alan laughed it off. It was all part of their double act. Jake had claimed that he’d seen her first.

She had been dancing in a flirtatious way and was extremely tactile when Jake finally danced with her. Alan watched them for a while. He saw Jake whisper in her ear and leave her then Jake approached Alan and shouted some instructions.

“Give me at least an hour - you know what I mean?” Jake made a series of suggestive gestures. This seemed a reasonable request. To be honest, Alan wasn’t bothered – she looked a bit of a slag anyway.

Alan remained at the beach disco for what seemed like hours but was really twenty minutes, before scrambling back home in the darkness, sucking on his bottle of beer as if it was his mother’s milk. Creeping in, he expected to hear noises, but the place was silent. So he stripped down to his underwear in the dark and slipped in to bed.

Just as he was drifting into a deep sleep he was aware of Jake stroking his back.

“Sod off,” he moaned and shuffled towards the edge of the hard mattress. His eyes fell shut again, when a hand grabbed him between the legs. “Stop being a twat and go to sleep, Jake.”

“It’s Zoe, actually,” said a girl’s voice.

“Oh, bloody hell ... er, hi, Zoe,” Alan replied. “You there too Jake?”

“No, he went out for a while,” the voice called Zoe explained and he felt her clamber on top of him, rip off his shorts then grab his hand, which she pressed to her firm breasts. Not able to believe his luck, he lay back, but he never thought of England.



As she pleased herself on top of him he chuckled trying to work out how he could thank his best mate – what a bloody great present.

The next day Alan woke up alone in the double bed, his cheek covered in his own dribble and he found that all the bedclothes, including the undersheet, were screwed into a ball surrounded by his clothes scattered on the floor. There was no sign of either Zoe or Jake and he wondered if they had gone back to her room; she seemed like that sort of girl. It was while he felt the sting of shampoo in his eyes that he was aware of a presence entering the bathroom.

“Jake?”

When there was no answer he wondered if it was Zoe returned to test out his true mettle. Pointing his face into the jet of water, he wiped his eyes clear and blinked at the figure before him. There stood a thickset man who was well over six feet, his arms bristling with tattoos, dressed in a Hawaii shirt.

“Oi, you bastard.” The man was looking at Alan’s naked, wet body and sizing him up for a fight. Before Alan knew what was going on, the man had punched him square in the nose. Alan felt it shatter, as he collapsed against the tiled shower wall. An unnerving amount of his own blood mingled with the soapy water on the floor. He was then helplessly dragged out onto the floor at the foot of the bed, where the big man placed a knee on his chest that prevented him from breathing properly. Alan only just had enough energy to stay conscious.

“You bastard pervert,” the man spat in his face. “I ought to cut your bollocks off. You make me puke.” The man grabbed Alan by his loose flesh and propped him in a sitting position against a wall. “I’ve called the police and I’m gonna have you done for rape.”

“Rape? What you on about?”

“Don’t play innocent, sonny. My little girl, you bastard! My little girl.” Unexpectedly, the big gorilla started to cry. “She’s only fourteen. Fourteen years old. How could you do it? You are one sick bastard. I hope they lock you up in some dungeon and torture you every day for the rest of your life.”

Was he talking about Zoe? This must be her dad. Fourteen? Hell, she’d been so tarted up and sexually confident, he hadn’t really had a proper look at her.

“Please, you have to understand. I didn’t rape her. It’s a misunderstanding. She came on to me and ...”

The man roared like a bull and smashed his fists against Alan’s shoulders. “You are such scum – the lowest of the low. My Zoe, my princess. Are you saying I shouldn’t believe her? And your own mate has dobbed you in. He told us everything that happened down to the last detail. He said you’d done it before and you make him watch and all. How many girls’ lives have you ruined now?”

Oh God! Alan started to panic. What the hell was going on? He was trapped. And who would believe him now? The police were on their way and he would be found guilty of raping a minor. The world had suddenly gone black and cold. Hostile, lonely darkness lay ahead of him.

Alan slowly got up and moved to the sink, turning on the taps so he could wash his face that ached and bled so profusely. Zoe’s dad was still weeping and rubbing his eyes.

“You bastard. My little girl. She’s my little girl.”

Alan heard a familiar voice.

“You stupid tosser.”

“Sorry?” Alan looked up and was relieved to see his friend. “Oh God, Jake I need your help.”

Jake helped the crying man up and whispered a few words to him. To Alan’s relief the man nodded and disappeared.

“Got you now, shitferbrains,” Jake looked at him with menace in his eyes. Alan laughed, thinking his friend was play-acting.

“I’m glad you came, mate...”

“I’m not your bloody mate,” his eyes flashed a look of hatred and it occurred to Alan that his friend was schizophrenic. He’d never seen him like this before; Jake was always smiling, chortling, being funny and generally witty. He was the joker – he’d always been the class clown at school, popular for his jokes and the way he could remember TV comedy sketches. Alan never considered Jake having a nasty side. Then Jake gave

a slow hand-clap.

“Congratulations. I can’t believe you fell for it. You’re so predictable. I knew you’d do it, too. Because you always do, don’t you?”

“What are you talking about?” Alan’s voice was strained with confusion.

“You always nick my girlfriends. It’s always you who gets the girl and it gets on my nerves. I knew she was only fourteen.”

The tone made Alan freeze and he eyed his friend warily. Before he could say anything, Jake continued with his vitriolic attack.

“You think you’re so bloody hard, strutting around, having any girl you want. You don’t give a crap about any of them. You have no feelings, no compassion. To you life’s just one long shag, isn’t it? You are such an arrogant bastard.”

“Hang on a minute, mate...”

“I’m not your mate!” Jake screamed, spittle flinging from his lips as he rose to confront Alan head on. Alan held his ground as the two eyeballed each other menacingly. He tried to decipher the rage possessing his friend. He didn’t recognise him, now. His features had shifted as if he’d been taken over by some demonic presence, contorting his face into a mass of ugliness. As Alan stood there he felt himself tremble. Next, he couldn’t avoid Jake’s head, which jerked back suddenly and then flew rapidly towards his own. On contact, the cracking sound came fractionally before the intense pain and then Alan found himself on the floor clutching at his head.

“That’ll teach you. Maybe if I rip your face off, you won’t be so popular then, eh? Who’s gonna shag the man with no face?”

Alan dragged himself up using the bed, but with his back to Jake who was circling round the room. As he stiffly turned to face the new danger, he saw something blurred in front of his eyes and felt a sharp blow connect with his cheek bone. Now riled beyond rational thinking, he summoned up all his instinctive energy and attacked in the direction of the blow, even though he could see nothing. He grabbed out wildly and found himself grasping at clothing. Alan lashed out his hand and found Jake’s hair, which he gripped tightly, forcing his opponent onto the floor. But Jake was a strong guy and his fist was pounding onto Alan’s head and into his midriff, winding him badly. Still hold of Jake’s hair, Alan also took hold of the other’s left arm and summoning all his strength, rammed him head first into the wall. Maybe that would knock some sense into him.

After a few moments, they both stirred, entangled in each other’s arms, like lovers. Jake giggled.

“You asshole. I hate you. I hate your fuckin’ guts and I’ve been wanting to tell you for so long now.”

“Why now?”

“Been waiting for the right moment,” he giggled.

“What, you’ve never liked me?”

“Did you know,” Jake was chuckling to himself now, “that Melinda is the only girl I have ever slept with? I fell in love with her, for real, and then she told me that she only agreed to sleep with me so she could fuck you. How was I supposed to feel, eh? I was crazy about her. I would’ve done anything for her. I was well and truly in love with her and then you dumped her like the selfish bastard that you are and as soon as you left her, she told me to piss off. At the time I was angry with her, but now I see how it’s your fault. It’s always your bloody fault. You never give a damn about what I want.”

Alan extricated himself from the tangle he was in with Jake and searched the other’s face for signs of irony. Instead his stare was met with a blank expression.

Jake continued staring at Alan as he spoke. “And I know about your little threesome with Melinda and Rosie.”

How the hell did he know that? Alan wondered. Shit! Jake knew about the thing with his sister? Who’d told him about that?

“Are you beginning to understand why I hate you?”

“But what about our plans?” asked Alan helplessly.

“You really think I want to spend a year with you? You’re more stupid than you look.”

Alan was having trouble processing all the information. “But you jacked in your job?”

“Oh that?” he sneered. “I lied. I haven’t resigned – just took a week’s leave.”

“What?” Alan spluttered incredulously. “Why come on holiday at all then?”

“Because I wanted to get you back for all the things you’ve done to hurt me. I want you to understand what I’ve been through. God, I really want to see you suffer!”

Jake’s silent smile was more terrifying than any violent threat. Where the hell had all this come from? Why now? If Jake hated him so much then why didn’t he just walk off and never see him again? He had to think and think fast.

“So you say you hate me for all these things. What is it jealousy?” Alan was stammering and trying to keep a clear head. “What if I told you that I’ve been jealous of you. You’re always so confident and you’re the one who makes all the friends. Do you realise that most of our mates are people you’ve introduced to me. You’re Mr. Popular, not me.”

“Yeah but you get the women.”

“What about all those girls you told me about?”

“All lies ... who’d want to shag an ugly twat like me?” Jake exploded. “You don’t get it do you? That’s you all over that is. I’m sick of your moaning and whinging. You’re not funny, you’re crap company, you always get me to do all the talking and hard work, and then you swan in like some bloody jade emperor and take the spoils and I’m supposed to praise you and tell you how wonderful you are. Well you’re not. You are a sad, piss-boring little toss-pot. I hate your bloody guts!” The volume made Alan jump. “Anyway, you seem to be forgetting something. The police are on their way. I will testify against you. Perhaps you’d better run.”

In his mind, Alan thought back to all the fun the two of them had enjoyed together. They shared a flat for two years and spent every evening together, dreaming about the future and planning their trip round the world. He wondered how long Jake had been thinking this way.

Rape! Oh my God.

Still naked, Alan ran faster than he’d ever run before. Panting and gasping, his feet pounded in the dirt. Then crossing an orchard, he belted across a grassy field past three old women who muttered to themselves. He kept running and running until he could see more buildings. These marked the coastline. Trying to avoid civilisation he ran further to the west, taking a longer line until he finally reached a steep path down a cliff face leading to a little secluded and empty cove. Not stopping until he reached the sea, he leapt into the water and winced as it stung his various cuts and wounds. The salt lashed his skin and ate further into each bloody gash, causing him to bleed anew. His face was particularly excruciating. The pain from his smashed nose spread to his eyes, ears and jaw, until the aching became unbearable. He knew he couldn’t stay near the water or he’d be spotted. So he crawled like a beast towards the cliff, hauling himself across some jutting rocks, wincing at each facial twitch and blinded by the blood. He found a small cave, dragged himself in and collapsed in a gory pile of bones.

It was night-time when he eventually came to. His eyes were glued closed with dried blood which he peeled away taking lashes and skin with it. Feeling with his fingers his nose was raw, swollen and misshapen; his entire face was an open wound. Outside was completely black, with only the stars piercing the chasm. As he sat there listening intently, he was only aware of the sound of the ocean hissing and soughing; all the rest remained silent. The world slept. As he clambered from the mouth of the cave and slid down the rock to the sand he felt the gnawing emptiness of hunger inside him. His head pounded with thirst and his breathing rasped from its dryness. Tip-toeing down to the water’s edge, he fell to his knees and scooped up and guzzled the salt-water. It made his face smart with pain and as he swallowed he felt it suck the goodness from his own brain as he screamed in a writhing, nauseous agony.

Then something splashed in the water around him a volley of plops in the water, when suddenly something hard hit him. Someone was throwing stones at him in the darkness. He looked around and his eyes could make out a stooped figure running towards him; and then he heard the shape growl.

A panic seized him. It was a matter of survival now. The voice came again like a war-cry: “Gonna get you, you bastard.”

The man with the broken nose felt scared but wasn’t sure why. He had forgotten his own name, too. The stooped, stocky figure was taunting him aggressively.

"I hate you. I hate your fuckin' guts."

"Leave me alone, please."

"Never."

"I did nothing."

"Bastard."

"Why are you doing this?"

"You know why."

Malicious words turned into repulsive, bestial growls and screams as the stooped creature lunged at his ugly, gashed opponent, who grappled back and then bit into the shoulder of the stocky one. It tasted good and recalled his hunger as he chewed the flesh and swallowed the juice flowing into his mouth. Thumbs pressed against broken-nose's throat, squeezing out his breath as he clawed, bit and kicked for his very life.

No thoughts went through those two regressed minds; just an anger, blind and full of the hatred feeding their rage until the two animals viciously ripped each other apart.

It was impossible for the police to recognise the remains of the two corpses, which may not have even been wholly human.

*"My name is Death: the last best friend am I"*  
Robert Southey, 'The Lay of the Laureate', 1816.

[jeffgardiner@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:jeffgardiner@blueyonder.co.uk)





© STEVE SCHINDLER 2012

<http://quest007.deviantart.com/>

# A FLURRY OF CLAWS DWC

Brian was late from work as usual.

She was so sick of this. Him using the job as an excuse. He just didn't want to see her. Not since the miscarriage.

There was this ugly silence between them now as if the whole world were stuck in a perpetual void that they couldn't get out of. It was the silence of a dying marriage.

She could remember the excitement on his face when she told him she was pregnant, the joy he exuded when they went to get the first sonogram, the gentle way he held her hand. The squeals of the in-laws and the "it's about time" look she got from her mother. They had been married seven years and hadn't procreated, by her family's standards this was like thumbing your nose at the Lord. "Procreation is our reason for being," her mother said, "It says so in the bible."

"So people who can't have kids, then they have no reason to be alive?" she asked.

Her mother told her not to sass her.

Then there had been the day she went shopping, she started feeling queasy around noon, somewhere between the orange Julius and the cinnamon sugar pretzel. She was vomiting and rushed to the mall bathroom where she found herself bleeding between the legs. A woman in the restroom pulled out her cell phone and called 911. Fifteen minutes later, she was screaming in the back of an ambulance as her baby ran down her leg.

Six months later and they still hadn't really spoken of it.

Every time they did it turned into a fight, some blame game, he said she should have been more careful and she would start screaming and spitting at him. There was a rage inside her that she hated, an anger at what? God? Fate? The dead baby?

She started seeing a psychologist. He told her to keep a dream journal. In her dreams, she was dying and as the doctor pronounced her dead on the table, he lifted the baby out of her open torso and into the arms of her loving family. They all oohed and ahhed over the newborn while she laid there sliced open and dead. In the dream, she screamed but no one could hear her.

*Despair is like a stench that clings to your skin*, she wrote in her journal. The more she read the statement, the more true it felt and now she stunk. Everywhere she went people seemed to stare at her, they felt her pain like a goth wears black clothes to say the world sucks or "I need a group to belong to". Her demeanor, her aura gave off a feeling of hopelessness and people would not look her in the eye and she was glad. I want them to know how I feel, she thought.

That night she popped an Ambien and tried to sleep. An hour later, she awoke with a start as she heard the sound of something moving on the floor of her room. They didn't have a dog or a cat but this thing didn't sound

like a domesticated animal. It lumbered across the floor and then hissed, she felt her entire body freeze up.

Nausea filled her.

Then she smelled it. It smelled like rotting flesh.

A strange wet sucking sound filled the room and then it jumped.

She froze, her entire body so frightened that it put her in a death lock.

Even her breath was shallow and almost non-existent.

It had the black soulless eyes of a possum but it's flesh was raw and exposed.

The creature clung to the baseboard at the end of the bed with its pale bluish and white skin throbbing like overused veins. It's entire body pulsated and smelled.

It smells like despair, she thought.

The alien roundness of its head was smooth and slick as it narrowed its blackened eyes at her. Then it hissed again as she twitched her leg.

She looked to the dresser for something to throw at it, maybe a lamp or—

It lifted its hands and elongated nails started to tear through the skin and move into long spirals. It ripped through her sheets with a flurry of claws and scratched her leg.

Now her leg throbbed like its skin and she felt her entire body tingle and grow numb from the neck down. She could not move. It had done something to her.

It climbed across her sheets, its lithe throbbing body moving seductively as it moved across her. It looked sticky. Tears pooled in the corners of her eyes. It looked down as if to kiss her and unleashed a long black tongue which rolled out of its mouth sloppily and lapped up the tears from her lids. Then its tongue moved again and licked her eyeball. She trembled and tried with all her might to move, to scream, anything but her entire body was frozen like a coma patient trapped in their own mind.

She imagined telling this to her therapist on Monday.

“Doctor, I had a giant demented fucking creature sneak into my bedroom the other night, it licked the tears from my eyes and paralyzed me with its claws. What does that mean?”

“Oh, it's merely a manifestation of your subconscious grief, my dear.”

Then she would pull up her pant legs and show him the marks. Then he would probably have her committed. She struggled to move her lips, “P-please..”

A whisper. Nothing more.

The creature stared down at her and it's face broke into a menacing grin looking like Pumpkinhead's retarded cousin or the offspring of Freddy Kruger and the alien from Aliens.



Then she heard the jangle of keys in the door.

Brian was home. He opened the front door.

She could hear his footsteps in the hallway.

“I’m home,” he announced to the empty house.

The creature turned its head.

It reached down then and touched her stomach, almost lovingly and gazed into her eyes.

It smelled my despair and came to me, she thought and it felt true.

Brian’s footsteps grew louder.

The creature moved with its rake-like fingers and burst through the door, splintering the wood and tackled Brian to the floor. All she heard was the screaming and cutting of flesh then the silence of death and the chewing as it fed. She could smell the rot.

It was her turn now.

She began to smile.



Submitted by Chiaki Samonte

# CRY

BY ANDREW GUERRA

The thrumming sound of the river enters my ears. Its ripples and warbles conjure memories from my youth. The days I spent knee deep in water searching for tadpoles and smooth pebbles. Later in the day, before dinner, I would return home with fresh bruises and puckered wounds. Twenty years have passed since then, and I'm in the dark retracing certain moments. My mind caught in the stream of past events.

The stars in the sky have hidden themselves from my sight. My eyes have adjusted to the tarry night and I feel the cold puncture my flesh. I am alone with my thoughts. One gem of a memory in particular, as I trudge through wet dirt, springs into my mind. When I was around ten years old, I would sit outside my home on a rotted log. Insects of all variety would crawl over my skin and I would enjoy the prickly sensation. As I sat, I heard a shriek coming from near the river. The screech caused everyone in the village to run towards that direction. When we arrived we saw a woman kneeling on the bank. She wore a soiled dress and had her back turned. Next to her were two neatly wrapped bundles, both different sizes.

One of the men approached her, as he did her weeping increased and so did her trembling. By the time he reached her she was almost translucent. Her whole body thinned to nothingness, until all that was left were the two bundles. The man, who stood as erect as the hairs on his arm, took one step back. As he did this, and after the shock of the moment had passed, the villagers ran back home terrified. Only one woman, an elder woman, along with myself remained. I, without having noticed, had staggered and fallen backwards. In my cowardice I watched as the elder woman strode forth. Not in a hurried pace or suggesting any sign of fear. She grabbed the man's arm firmly and whispered something in his ear. He looked at her, with his mouth still agape and sweat covering his neck, then followed her to the wrapped objects. They both bent down, held a bundle each, and tossed them into the river. What I saw, before they sank into the murky water, was an arm. An infant's arm.

I now press my sweater tight around me, the cold has become unbearable. A few yards ahead I catch a glimpse of something, a white figure surrounded by a small group of fireflies. As I near I can see a woman's shape outlined by the light. The illumination from the insects dim and flicker making her out of focus. She's wearing a long white dress, with the bottom half being tugged downstream by the river. The same soiled dress from years ago.

I am much colder than before, colder than I've ever been. My heart beats faster and rises up to my throat. The fear has overtaken my body. My pace quickens as I try to pass her. The stride turns into a full sprint as I hear a mixture of wind and weeping. A cry so similar it deafens my ears and creates a sharp pain to course throughout my skull. This agony forces my knees to buckle, causing me to tumble. My eyes are blinded by wet soil and through muddied eyes I see her stand before me, in all her grotesque elegance. The woman who murdered her children generations before my time. She kneels down to me and presses both thumbs on my eyes. The pressure causes me to shriek and beg her to stop, but she continues. I feel the warmth of blood pour down my cheeks and into my mouth. As I screamed I heard her murmur something. To help her find her children.



# PLAIN SIGHT

## BY JAY WILBURN

The creature felt along the dark wall until he reached the smooth glass of the mirror. He pulled it open dumping bottles out into the sink. He felt around the caps and the deteriorated labels. There was nothing he could use. He pushed the mirror back closed on its hinge leaving blood stains in four-fingered handprints over the surface in the dark. He could not see the mess he had left behind.

He slid his claws down the surface of the sink and then scraped along the pipes underneath it.

The tile was wet with blood. When he felt the coldness of it, the creature's bare flesh rippled along his back and down along the multiple joints of his limbs.

They were close and he didn't have much time.

He started sweeping his claws more frantically along the tile. Gore splattered up on the walls. His breathing increased. The claw on his longest talon sliced through the sole of the man's shoe. He felt it cut through the rubber and then the cotton sock to the cold flesh of the foot.

He brought his hand back slowly and pulled the body toward him by its ankle. Curved waves rippled out along the blood and then echoed back across the surface. He felt up along the man's thick legs, over his hips, past the gun still in the holster. He reached into the cavity in the belly through the shredded shirt. He felt through the contours of torn flesh to get a full understanding of the open wound.

The man was bigger. He had put up a considerable fight. The creature had actually been afraid for a moment when they struggled. It was exhilarating. His body provided more bulk and a better hiding place.

The creature drove his claw down deeper between the smooth organs. One talon scraped along the bone around the spine. As he drew his arm back out, he grazed the surface of the appendix. A small split opened and thick paste spilled out over the back of his hand. The man's appendix was infected and had been ready to rupture. The creature was more impressed with the man's fight than he had been before that knowledge. A shiver of fear ran up his arm and over his flesh.

He smiled and pulled out his claw without wiping it clean.

They would know the man and search him too closely. It would be too obvious.

The creature crawled over the corpse. His tail dragged over the man's body behind him. He felt around the other bodies. The children were too small. One of the women was fat and spacious, but again it would be too obvious.

He found the body of another woman. He felt around her hips and ribs. She was average height and weight. Her breasts were heavy and cold. He found five wounds around her chest, ribs, and buttocks. Once he felt what he needed, he carefully pulled off the remains of her shirt. It was difficult with his claws, but he unbuttoned her

pants and worked down the zipper. They were too tight for her. He worked her slacks down and off her cold legs. He decided to leave her underwear.

There was a noise from up the hall. He turned his head toward the vent at the base of the door. He was out of time. The flesh around his skull pulsed. The flat space on the creature's face where humans kept their eyes throbbed with fear.

He ducked down and extended his long tongue into the blood over the tile. He whipped it from side to side absorbing as much as he could. Cold blood made his stomach ache, but he needed the energy.

As his flesh began to fold and his bone separated. He growled, but then bit down on the pain. It was difficult as his teeth retracted into his bloody gums.

He reached down with his claws and ripped at the woman's naked body. He tore the wounds wider and ripped out organs casting them aside in the room. As his own body compressed in on itself, he felt her face. His digits were thinning out and his claws were becoming nails. He felt inside her empty eye sockets to see if he had left anything behind. They were scooped clean. He locked the nails from both hands into the skin of her cheek and pulled. When he started, he had four fingers on each hand, but once the dead woman's features were obscured beyond recognition, his hands had five human fingers each.

He flexed his fingers feeling the strangeness of the extra digit.

The footsteps were running down the hall.

The creature pulled his arms through the remains of the shirtsleeves. The buttons were gone, so he couldn't cover his heavy breasts. He pulled on the slacks that were a little tight for his legs. He zipped up and buttoned the front. It was awkward with the extra finger, but easier than with the talons. He pinched his tender skin in front and hissed.

The doorknob turned. The creature dropped to his back in the floor flinging his long, blond hair in the blood. The creature hissed again. He forgot about the hair. He hoped they wouldn't notice the similar hair on both bodies.

The door opened and the grown men screamed like children. One of them turned around to vomit.

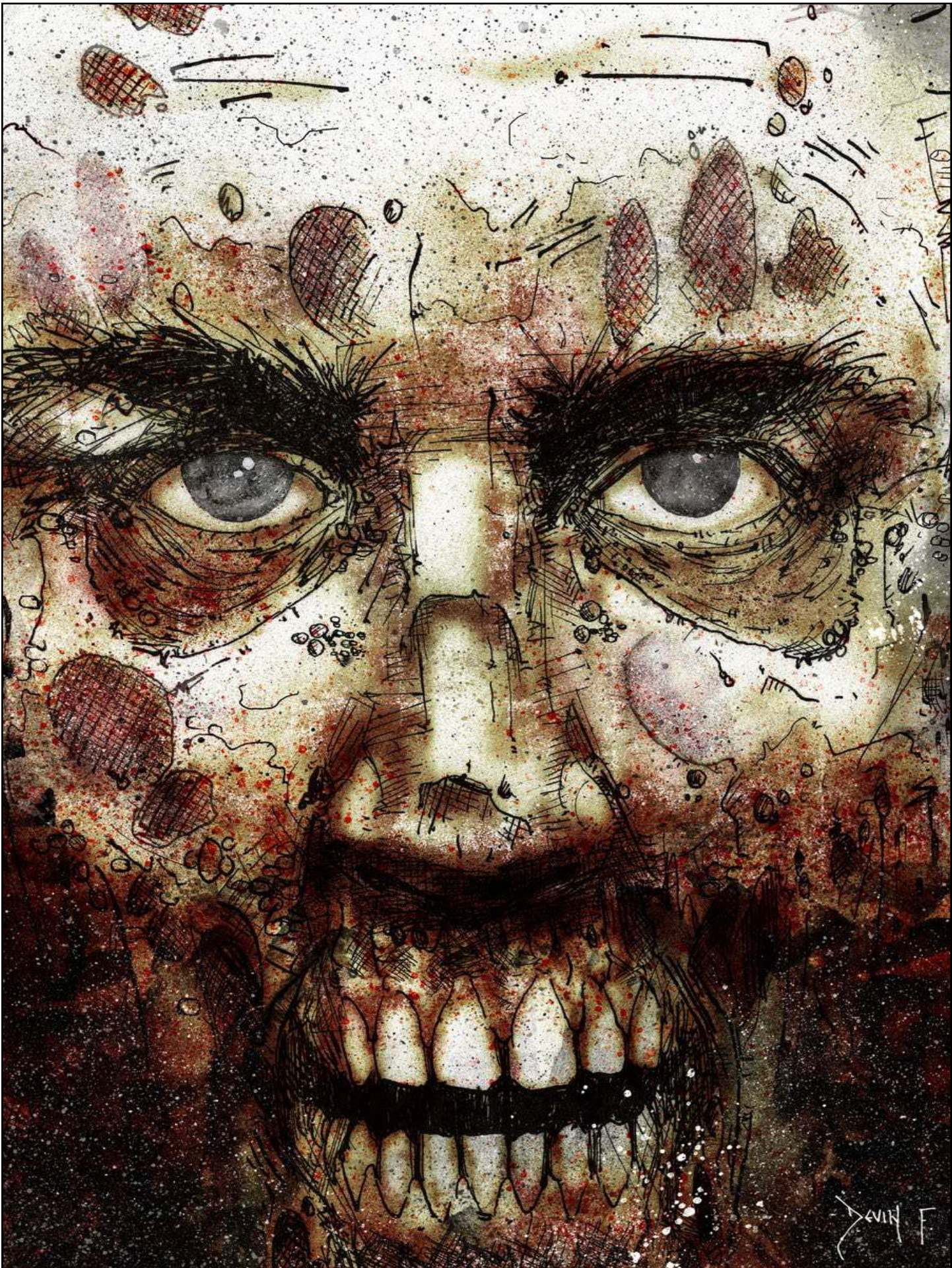
Over the next several hours, the creature listened and tried to only breathe when he was alone. He listened to pictures snap and detectives talk. One of them poked at the creature's wound between his breasts with a pen. Finally, they began bagging up the bodies nearest the door.

One mumbled through his mask. "Why did he take their eyes?"

Another answered, "Don't try to understand these kinds of monsters. That's someone else's job."

The creature waited for his opportunity.





<http://devin-francisco.deviantart.com/>



# **"THE WALKING DEAD", THE TELEVISION SERIES**

## **JOSEPH J. PATCHEN**

"Darker, harder, faster, deeper" is not Jayden James newest cinematic offering, but AMC's teaser for the much anticipated October 14, Season 3 return of "The Walking Dead".

Got your attention?

What has my attention for Season 3 is the newness of this age old zombie apocalypse. First, we encounter a cast shake up and the much ballyhooed appearance of two new characters that readers of the comic book have been drooling for: The Governor and Michonne. Second, we trade the farm for a new locale: a prison - a place where "darker, harder, faster, deeper" has always had a meaning of its own.

This leads me to a confession: I have not read the comic. I wasn't even aware the show was based on anything other than the creators' desire to twirl yet another zombie apocalypse tale.

Initially I wasn't even a fan of the show. I was 'zombied out' and my viewing habit consisted of watching the show so I could make fun of it and pester my wife who is a huge fan. Plus I got a huge kick out "The Talking Dead" and hung around for that experience.

But something happened. I began talking to my television: 'Jesus Christ Rick, will you just kick some ass!' and 'Shane, you are an idiot!'. I tied into the acting, which was far from camp. I began hating certain characters (You know it's you, Lori!). And credit goes to those talented actors who can elicit that kind of response from an audience.

It's amazing that the performances in a television show about genetically altered human beings is more real, more authentic, more emotionally human, than most of the 'reality' television shows that, to me, are completely overrun with 'genetically altered' human beings.

I then began listening to the writing: it wasn't crap. There is a real story here: the story of a civil war of sorts, for the heart and soul of humanity. There is an actual plot here that does not solve itself, that week, in twenty or forty four minutes. This is more than just rampant rabid zombie bloodshed. Face it, if it were just zombie hoards running amuck it would be 'Snakes On A Plane.' Fun for five minutes but then time turn the channel because it's just a bunch of snakes on a plane.

And there is also something more here than what recent critics say is a soap opera. For all those who have complained about the characters dealing with their feelings, please consider that every story has a main, overall plot - in this case, zombies versus humans - with subplots that allow characters to interact with one another. The conflicts between characters allow the characters to develop personalities beyond one-dimensional stereotypes, which in turn allows the audience to hopefully empathize with the characters and propel the series from week to week. The living, breathing characters make a given plot work or collapse. This is what made "The Shield" so exemplary: the house of cards that could topple at any moment from within. This is also what has made "Breaking Bad" so brilliant: there are internal threats competing with the overall external threat.

I have invested in these characters, and I, like many of you, have begun to immerse myself in their world. Where are the flame throwers? Can't they find one flame thrower in an armory or at least a propane torch in a hardware store? Wouldn't a flame thrower fashioned with a bayonet be a really cool way to kill walkers?

Before we look toward to the third season, let's recap where we are.

If you survey the net, you'll find that fans and critics alike overwhelmingly fell in love with the first season. Obviously, the novelty of the story coming to life from the printed pages of the comic was a thrill for those already locked-in fans. For us newbies, there was the emotional tension of waking up and not knowing, the fear of discovery: that made the first part of Season 1 a huge topic for the water cooler and the texts. We saw through Rick's eyes, we heard through Rick's ears, we thought his thoughts with him, for the first time walking through this strange, savage new world alone. It was pure adrenalin. The adrenalin of not only preserving our own survival, but the adrenalin of fueling the panic in finding our loved ones, to find out what may be causing this as we look for a way out of the horror.

But soon, just like General Robert E. Lee, a century and a half before, I was disappointed with the news from Atlanta.

The whole CDC (Centers For Disease Control And Prevention) scenes, while a popular story arc, fell flat for me. The lone, last scientist, the cryptic whisper, the ticking down clock, the doomsday blast...really? Somehow, I think the government would have established the CDC as a beach-head given that it was portrayed as impenetrable, a massive under and above ground facility, a small city in itself, with the research labs and personnel to find the 'cure'.

Remember those choppers that occasionally fly over. I have trouble buying into the thirty days of fuel to run the CDC, then nothing. The government always has contingency plans. There already exist animal DNA and seed banks miles underground in various parts of the world, stockpiled for the rebuilding after a doomsday event. None of this is adequately addressed.

The plausibility of "breaking through" the CDC glass to escape the implosion defies belief since that glass is tested to withstand grenades. While I understand the need to give the audience a big bang I might have enjoyed it better if I had some dinner and a little dancing first.

In preparation for Season Two, the destruction of the CDC seemed such an inferior concept for this series. It was as if the writers didn't know what to do with the CDC once our survivors had found it, so they simply chose to cop out with the mad scientist option.

Season Two came lush with new characters and subplots. However, these quickly became bogged down in predictability, which made it less exciting than the first season. Based on a perusal of both critical and fan reaction, my sentiments are not that far off.

By the time we get to the farm, we know that Shane is losing his personal battle between self-control and the established hierarchy, all fueled by his lust for Lori. His alpha dog personality emerges as he watches Rick invariably waiver at every turn. Rick's wife, Lori, appears to enjoy psychologically seducing and torturing anything in pants while taking her own frustrations out against the other women. It becomes only a matter of time before Rick and Shane will square off and I doubted very much that the reactionary, almost schizophrenic, Shane would defeat the calmer, cooler, not to mention headliner, Rick.

Dale, though he thinks of himself as the voice of reason, proves to be totally unprepared for this world: he insists on applying the rules of a civilized society to an uncivilized existence. While I was personally happy that he had talked Andrea out of the CDC suicide, I question his thinking. Why did he not put as much effort into convincing the others who remained? Why hide the cache of guns at the farm, thereby putting everyone at risk? His protests on behalf of the renegade Randall pissed me off as well. His words and actions throughout the

season made me believe that when his moment came, like the Czar, he probably deserved it.

The stand-out episodes of Season Two featured Darryl as a solo. Powerfully pulled off by a heretofore background character, each was perfection in writing, acting and filming. Norman Reedus is an actor I would like to see more of, as he can command the camera.

Characters from Season 1 meet characters for Season 2. Meet, mate, chat and kill. Enough of the past, let us look ahead.

As our palate was being cleansed at the zombie cookout and farm jamboree, the cosmic shuffle was on. Who would live? Who would die? Andrea was left behind, fighting valiantly and forced to make her escape alone on foot through a wooded area: zombies to the left, zombies to the right, everywhere a zombie this horrific night.

And just as Andrea was about to be overrun and initiated into the union, Michonne appeared - with apologies to Tim Tebow - in a legitimate Jesus Christ moment. Not only was she Andrea's savior, but the katana wielding, hooded figure beheading Andrea's attacker, with two armless and jawless walkers in tow, was a lot to digest - for the uninitiated. For those in the know, awaiting her appearance, it was "Jesus Christ---Finally!"

It will be interesting, at the very least, to see how she interacts with our new and improved Ricktator. Michonne won't be Shane; she is a survivor, as cold blooded and calculating as she needs to be. And by virtue of her sex, we know Lori will hate her.

How will the group exploit Michonne's companions? Tactically, our survivors have used the dead to escape detection in the past - first when they smeared guts on themselves to escape a building and subsequently whenever they've rolled dead bodies over themselves. Makes one wonder why they haven't refined this stealth technology? It is a brilliant stroke on Michonne's part. I can't wait to see how she performs the surgery, especially in such close quarters as the prison.

Add the close grip of The Governor. Lori at least might like him: he's a man and a sadist at heart - a villain within a villain, someone more horrible than the hordes themselves. Rick versus The Governor should shape up to be better than Pacquiao versus Mayweather. At least we know this battle of control freaks is going to happen.

Cast in the role of The Governor is David Morrissey, a British actor and director, with an impeccable stage career at the Royal Shakespeare Company following his training at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. 'Dr. Who' fans may remember him as 'Jackson Lake' from the 2008 Christmas Special titled "The Next Doctor". Morrissey is a versatile actor whose mere presence should escalate the terror wrought by the self-proclaimed ruler of this new world.

And as anyone under attack will tell you: the great wide world shrinks. Anyone who has survived a relentless and constant attack - be it in the context of a war, a determined stalker, or a horrible abusive existence - will attest to feeling imprisoned. That is the metaphor for Season 3; Our perpetual victims will be further victimized by seeking refuge in a prison, where the walkers and renegades will swirl around them, like a noose around their necks.

I truly wonder who will emerge as the hero, if there is such a thing anymore. Where Season 2 was criticized for chatting, Season 3 proffers to be a season for mayhem, torture, and more fun than snakes on a plane.



# DEATH FROM ABOVE, BELOW CHRIS PARKER

Lords who once anticipated me are no longer in my service. Dissolved the moment I'm born . . .

Flesh-congealed, I walk among the crowds. Only the further away I get the more at home I feel. A father with me part of the way. Praying in the shade of a dying tree, untroubled as to acknowledge such primordial regrets.

- Get up! I scream. I've had nightmares of this happening . . .

Purple specters slink out of the haze to wrap themselves around him. The moon is too bright & I see everything. Bits of him sluice between the dark cracks, down into the belly of the earth. Loam he harbored for so many years.

I experience loneliness for the first time. A hive of bees in my stomach, I vomit on the trail: to nowhere . . . While drifting signs assail me.

Messages from the ambivalent dawn. When seeds were gods swirling up in the howling Winds of Meru. Under churning oceans where larva have begun to form & take root in increasingly complex conjunctions of reality.

Straining my mind to think about it. Is it because I'm human, or something other than human straining against it? Do I murder a human side in order to enter the widening orbit? Can I return to the mountains?

I've seen this in visions. Seven rings of mountains; seven lakes. Unearthly stars reflected in the deeps - Penetrating down to murky bottoms where, in refracted light, consciousness begins taking shape . . .

I walk these woods alone searching for the key. No mountains do I see, but an endless labyrinth of trees. Forgetful of ANY father, & only a mother underfoot, I begin to assume the role of her rooted yet ephemeral spirit.

Memories outside the scope of matter & time begin to churn up from a wasteland of my experiences here on Earth. With nothing but her hand to guide me through these endless caves. Darker times ahead, in the light.

I burned to get here & I will burn to go; always burning, even in flesh that drags me down. Under a

sun that cloaks me in solace & hardship.

Across her vines & into the Vulval Temple.

I've been here before, but not quite the same as this . . .

Flesh piled moistly on the floor opens like a flower, reveals the swirling pool within. Reflected are the moments I've had. Visions I sought in the flesh - Or portals to the Outside. When she opens her legs for me I am free.

Loosened to worlds below. Loam of the earth. Where rests a gate leading to the valley below . . .

No more trees, but marbled stone. Etched into by breeze, & languages rising over sand. Four tribes of suffrage & communion bearing marks of retribution. Come to share their disapproval of my escaping . . .

They think I'm beastly even though they're the beastly ones. Who allowed me to stray as far as I did, believing I was human. Now, pulling me out of sand, where molecules of worlds commingled. There are no gods here, but forces.

They'd rip me apart most ever day. Confuse & bleed me. Traveling within this moist, alien seed. Under the impression that I'm wandering a maze without any exits. Yet trapped & beguiled by mind's free & drifting awareness.

How could they, who've no opinion of humanity what-so-ever, want to watch me pretend I'm one of them? When they have power to undo the spell & show me what lies so close - Consciousness of living, breathing shadows . . .

They take me to their cave on the side of a lake & strip me to my bones. Dancing around a fire nearby in a twisted form. Draped in my guts which hang near the ceiling, at the top of forked poles.

Deep moans wrenching out of them as its sickness comes to pass. Every cosmos that ever survived, if even for a moment, suffered from it.

Satisfied enough to move me from their altar & into the circle. In this time the world is shattered & ALL time with it.

How would I've known to visualize this had I not experienced it . . . ?

Imprint of a dream on the side of a mountain. There is gold beneath its flesh if only you would look for it. Ugly, hideous crags between. Boles of faith & fear to choke the passage. No hardness of reason or willingness to stand.

Your fathers do not know the way. Look to shores of space & drifting messages, light ensconced by shadow feeding off electric currents from within.

All personal mythology lies here. Sublime, yet torturous truths. Empty trials of knowing - Gathering symbols from the fringe of expanded memory. Arranging them in ways, unknown - A mountain stirs, & you are NOT alone.



# Freak Gallery:


An Original Surreal Grotesque Comic



Written by: Daniel W. Gonzales  
Drawn by: Leonardo M.

WTF






PEOPLE LOOK AT ME SOMETIMES FROM MY GOOD SIDE AND THINK, WHY IS THAT BEAUTIFUL WOMAN HIDING HER FACE? ...AND THEN I TURN AND THEY SEE THE HORRIBLE TRUTH. IN SOME WAYS...



I AM ALREADY DEAD...




WHEN I WAS SEVEN YEARS OLD, MY MOTHER LIT THE HOUSE ON FIRE INTENDING ON KILLING HERSELF AND ME. I DIDN'T DIE BUT SHE DID



HALF OF MY BODY WAS BADLY BURNED, I WAS IN A COMA FOR WEEKS. I HAD NO REAL FAMILY OUTSIDE OF MY MOTHER SO I WAS PUT IN AN ORPHANAGE



THE OTHER KIDS HATED ME. THEY MADE FUN OF ME



I TRIED TAKING MY LIFE LOTS OF TIMES. CUTTING MY WRISTS, TAKING PILLS BUT SOMEONE WAS ALWAYS THERE TO STOP ME



IT WASN'T MY TIME YET. HE WANTED SOMETHING FROM ME



I KNOW THE TRUTH THOUGH, IT WAS ALWAYS HIM...





THE WORST WASN'T THE BURNS ON THE OUTSIDE THOUGH. MY MOTHER'S ABUSE BEGAN MUCH SOONER BEFORE THEN.

MY FIRST MEMORY IS OF HER BREAKING MY ARM FOR CRYING TOO LOUDLY.



SHE WOULD BE KIND AND NICE ONE DAY AND THEN A RAGING MONSTER THE NEXT. I WOULD FIND HER IN HER ROOM WEeping AND THEN ONE DAY SHE WOULD BE BAKING CLIP-CAKES AND WEARING AN APRON AS IF SHE WAS A TV MOM.



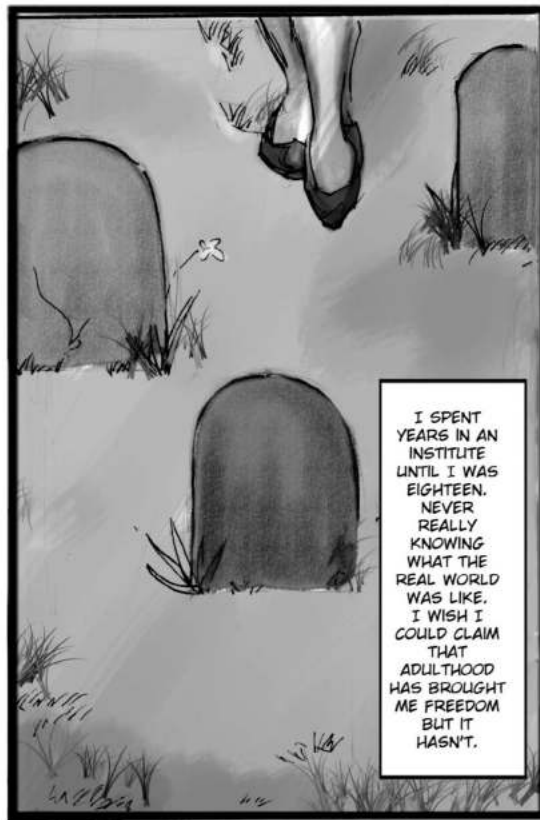
THE DOCTORS TELL ME THAT SHE PROBABLY HAD BORDER-LINE PERSONALITY DISORDER. SOMETHING THAT I PROBABLY SHARE IN COMMON WITH HER



MY EMOTIONS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN CHAOTIC



WHEN I FINALLY WAS PLACED WITH A FAMILY WHEN I WAS THIRTEEN, MY STEP-BROTHER TRIED TO HAVE SEX WITH ME, I CLAWED HIS FACE AND THEY SAID I WAS PSYCHOTIC.



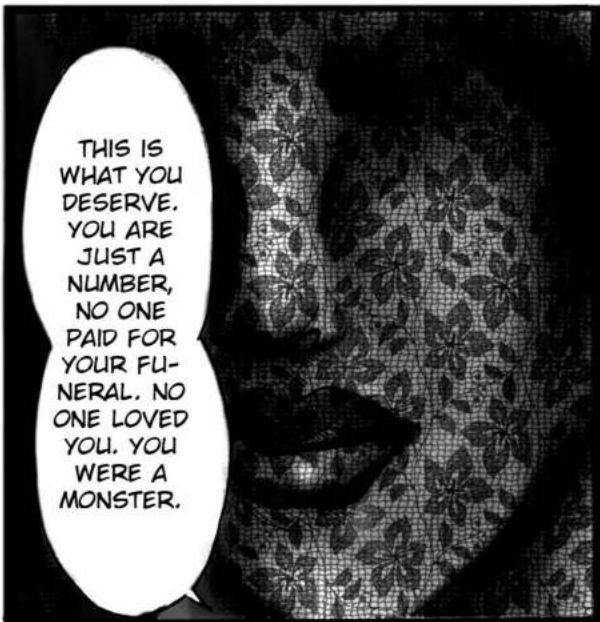
I SPENT YEARS IN AN INSTITUTE UNTIL I WAS EIGHTEEN. NEVER REALLY KNOWING WHAT THE REAL WORLD WAS LIKE. I WISH I COULD CLAIM THAT ADULTHOOD HAS BROUGHT ME FREEDOM BUT IT HASN'T.



I WORK AT AN ADULT BOOKSTORE BEHIND A COUNTER AND IGNORE THE GAZES OF THE MEN WHO STARE AT ME WITH DISGUST AS THEY GO OFF INTO THE BOOTHS TO MASTURBATE. I LIVE LIKE A NOMAD AMONG THE FRINGE OF SOCIETY. I AM A NOBODY.



THIS IS ALL YOUR FAULT.



THIS IS WHAT YOU DESERVE. YOU ARE JUST A NUMBER, NO ONE PAID FOR YOUR FUNERAL. NO ONE LOVED YOU. YOU WERE A MONSTER.





ALICEEEEEEE!!!



ARGGG!!!!



WORK GODDAMMIT!



IT WAS HIM!...



ROOOOM

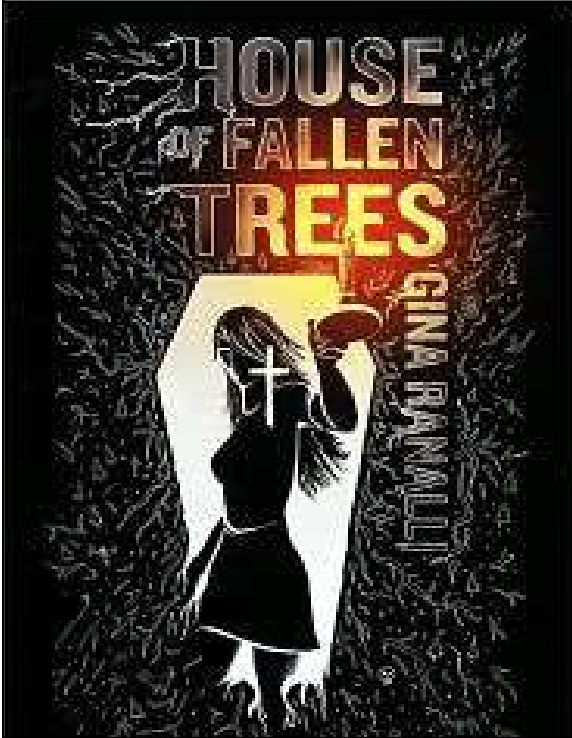
# special thanks and credits

Cover art, pages 2,3, 6,7,8, 31, 36,70-71, 84, 94, 98, 142, 156, 164, 167 & by: <http://almanegra.deviantart.com/>  
pgs. 15 and 45 by <http://clockworkmarionette.deviantart.com/>  
Art by <http://d3vilusion.deviantart.com> on pgs. 16, 19-25  
Artwork by Devin Francisco on pgs. 26, 32, 46-47, 93, 104, 149, 158, 160, 172 & 180  
<http://devin-francisco.deviantart.com/>  
Page 29 and back cover, features the art of: <http://diamoneyes.deviantart.com/>  
Page 62 picture by <http://frozen-scumbag.deviantart.com/>  
Images by Dan Henk on pages 76-77, 82-83,  
Pages 114-115, 122 and 150 by Steve Santiago: <http://quest007.deviantart.com/>  
Adrian Exile on pgs. 48, 103, 141, 159 and 174  
<http://adrianexile.deviantart.com/>  
Page 134 by <http://marielasbleiz.deviantart.com/>  
Pages 126, 128 and 130, art by: <http://snook-8.deviantart.com/>  
Pages 168-172, story by Daniel Gonzales and art by: Leonardo Magallán, better known as Leon Svankmajer. I'm from Buenos Aires (Quilmes city) Argentina. Student of Art, 22 years old and lover of surrealist horror terror art  
<http://laito-no-sekai.deviantart.com/>  
Page 184 from <http://steamed-pepsi-stock.deviantart.com/>  
Illustration by Pedro Silva, pg. 190: <http://morbido13.deviantart.com/>  
Pages 191-192 by <http://n0hav0cyet.deviantart.com/gallery/34047344>



# GINA RANALLI: THE QUEEN OF WEIRD

## REVIEW BY DANIEL W. GONZALES

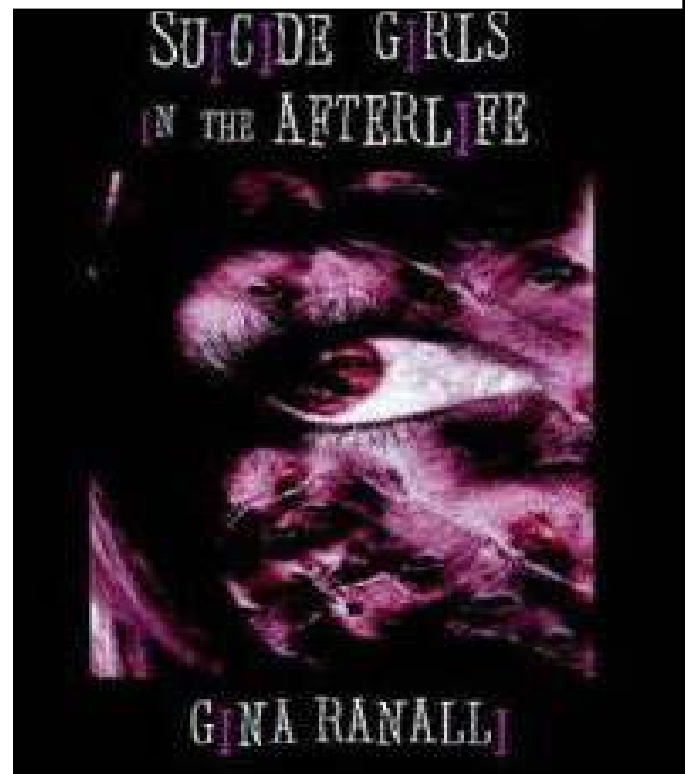


One thing you can say about a Gina Ranalli book is that you never know what you are getting yourself into. “House of Fallen Trees” starts out with a line of whispered words as if from a dream to our main character, “Two men have the carcass.” Then our protagonist Karen Lewis, a writer, goes in search of her brother who disappeared in the small town of Fallen Trees, Washington, she learns more about him than she ever did before. She learns that he had an entire secret life and a boyfriend. What could have been a simple murder mystery turns into a story about a sister who gets to know her brother through death more than life. While Ranalli started out in the unique niche of being labeled a ‘bizarro writer’ she is much more than that, her writing seems to have a subtlety that bizarro lacks. It’s a human story worthy of a classic haunted house tale.

“Suicide Girls in the Afterlife” on the other hand is a total 180 degree turn, it is more of a short story novella than a novel but for what it lacks in length, it delivers in stream-of-consciousness surreality. It’s like an acid trip to the afterlife

which is represented as a really shitty hotel, an afterlife with a class system using floors and food that sings. Not to mention the devil, an ornery old lady and some other fun weirdos she meets along the way. Suicide Girls is more of an Alice in Wonderland if Alice died and went to Purgatory. Personally I identify with Ranalli as a fellow Washingtonian, her writing reflects the strange contradiction of a start that harbors a major metropolitan city like Seattle but is surrounded by a body of water and a bunch of tiny miniscule towns that thrive off seclusion. She takes this abrasiveness and wfeeling of solitude to her writing which feels simultaneously provocative but personal.

She is also the author of several other novels including Mothman Emerged, Rumors of my Death, Praise the Dead, Chemical Gardens, Wall of Kiss and Mother Puncher. You can find out more about her at [www.ginaranalli.com](http://www.ginaranalli.com) or on her twitter #GinaRanalli.







# EL DIA DE LOS MUERTOS

## THE MEXICAN DAY OF THE DEAD

### BY PEDRO SILVA

The first thing to you need to know about the “Dia De Los Muertos” it’s that it is not the Mexican version of Halloween, although they share the fact that both are “All Hallow’s Eve”. And the second thing you need to know it’s that it ain’t as scary as it is a tradition with prehispanic roots.

The celebration comes from the time of the Mexicas who celebrated for an entire month in honor of Mictecacíhuatl “The Lady of The Death”, the wife of Mictlantecuhtli (The Lord of The Land of The Death). And it was the only time of the year in which the soul of the dead were allowed to return to the land of the living.

When the Spaniards conquered the Mexicas they bonded many of their own catholic beliefs and holidays with the ones the Mexicas already had. And so The Day Of The Dead was created.

In this, our modern days, it is celebrated on November the first and the meaning remains the same : a day (and it’s night) that we have the opportunity to be with our loved ones, who happen to be dead. The day the souls of the departed can return to Earth to be with their families and friends.

But it’s not easy for the souls to come back. So there’s the custom to make “Altars de Muertos” (Altars of the dead), which are full of the dead person’s favorite foods, beverages and other things in order to make the comeback more appealing to them.

In the center of the altar is placed the picture of the person -or persons - to be honored and it’s adorned with “Flores de Cempasuchil” (a variety of vivid orange marigolds), the catholic cross and “Veladoras” (praying candles) to show the dead their way home through the darkness.

Then there’s the soul’s favorite food such as : enchiladas,tacos, tortas, lonches, pozole, sopos, quesadillas, caldos, birrias, burritas and even pizza and hamburgers. And beverages as : tequila, mezcal, charanda,pulque, atole, agua fresca, café, coca-colas and beers.

Some people also puts their favourite brand of cigarettes, magazines and even drugs. In fact, anything that family and friends know the person liked when alive. It is a complete feast in order to make the soul feel happy to be back, if only for one day.

This is called “Ofrendas del Dia de Muertos” (the offerings of The Day Of The Dead).

There’s also especially made food to celebrate the day, such as “Pan de Muertos” (Bread of the dead) which is a buttery bread adorned with little bread-made bones at the top and “Calaveritas de Azúcar” (little skull-shaped sugar candy) which bear names on their foreheads and which are also given as gifts.

This food is left at the altar all night in the belief that the soul will eat and drink all they want and then the living can do the same the next morning when the soul has returned satisfied to the land of the death.

Altars are made as large as you can imagine, with many people participating on their making. Altars are also made at schools, working places and public places as a way of preserving Mexican traditions opposed to the

foreign Halloween, although most people one way or another celebrate both.

Another tradition it's to go the dead person's grave.

Many people visits the "Panteon" (cemetery) at night, bringing flowers, food and drinks for the dead person. They often

have picnics around the grave as they tidy it and they often bring the dead person's favourite music. It is a wonderful view as the dark night is lit with many bonfires, music coming from Mariachis, Norteño bands and even Rock bands fills the night's party atmosphere as all the families and friends sing, drink, eat, cry, laugh or share stories of their memories together in celebration of death as well as life.

One specially world-wide known place for the celebration is the lake of Janitzio in the Mexican state of Michoacan, where the cemetery is placed in an island in the center of the lake. At midnight, hundreds of boats travel through the water filled with many, many lighted candles as a beautiful reflection of the stars above. Another tradition is to write "Calaveras" (skulls), which are satirical rhymed verses mocking friends, family members, famous actors, athletes and specially politicians. This writings are often published on news papers and read on radio and television on the first of November.

Many adults and children have the custom of dressing up as skeletons with their faces painted white and eye sockets black. Many people create wonderful disguises mostly based on "La Catrina" (the elegant lady) the iconic work of engraver Jose Guadalupe Posada : a female skeleton elegantly dressed in a late 1800's French style.

So, there's food, drinks, music and skeletons, after all this is a celebration and a reminder to enjoy life, even if you're dead.

[www.morbido13.deviantart.com](http://www.morbido13.deviantart.com)

[www.facebook.com/PedroSilvaPAINter](https://www.facebook.com/PedroSilvaPAINter)





J. M. F.

# THE EVIL THAT MEN DO

## Part 5

### By Kent Miller

“The evil that men do lives after them; The good is oft interred with their bones”. Act 3, Scene II – *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare

Warning: This story contains graphic adult situations, including vulgarity, nudity and torture. Reader discretion is advised.

The husband and wife sat next to each other on a wooden bench, the dark breakfast room of the old mansion lit by a single lantern on a table before them. Their wrists manacled behind each other, they shared a blanket to warm their nude bodies. Annie spoon-fed thickened broth to them along with a bit of bread and water placed on the table before them. She was watching them carefully for any signs of becoming ill due to eating too much food after being essentially starved by Archie, but it seemed they were taking it well. From the looks of them, they would rather eat each other up from all the kissing and nuzzling they were doing.

“Hey, hey, enough of that for now.” Annie chastised in mock sternness. “You need to get your strength back so concentrate on getting some food, all right?” She glanced between Kent’s legs. “Course, Karen, you might want to eat something else. I know I would.”, she teased. Karen blushed and looked away.

“Arf, arf.”, Kent responded, with a wan smile. Annie chuckled. Karen stopped eating and gave the two a bewildered look.

“What?”, she inquired.

Kent saw Karen’s reaction, and then looked down at the table somewhat chagrined. “Arf, arf. Just kidding. Annie gave me a bath earlier and it seemed like... well, like...” Kent fell silent, groping for words.

Karen was dumbfounded. She looked at him in silence for several uncomfortable seconds. Then she finished his sentence for him.

“... like you were getting bathed like a dog? You were joking with these people? Kent, this is no laughing matter! These people kidnapped us! They’ve already tortured us once some time ago for the enjoyment of it! Do you call my being repeatedly violated something to joke about?” Karen was looking at Kent as if for the first time. She was both horrified and enraged.

Kent edged closer to her on the bench. “Honey, I’m sorry, I’m sorry. I was just trying to put up a good front, but I wasn’t thinking. I know, you’re right. I won’t do that again, ok?”

But Karen was just winding up. “Put up a good front? What about our families and friends that are searching for us? My mother and father I know are worried sick about me, just like yours are about you!” She stood up, causing the blanket to slip away and reveal their nakedness. She was working herself into a real

lather, which frightened Kent with its intensity. “And, you... you just sit here... and... and... joke along with one of these slimy criminals?”, she shouted.

“Hey!,” Annie exclaimed. “You better sit down, little girl and eat some more, or else Renee will have to...”

Karen turned on Annie, scoffing. “Or else what? You already had your way with us once, using that horrid strap-on thing on both Kent and me. And you have the nerve to imply that it might get worse for us? How?”

The approaching clatter of boots on hardwood floors caused all three to look in the direction of the basement steps leading to the breakfast room.

“I’ll answer that.”, said Renee, ascending into the breakfast room, dressed up in a red latex devil’s outfit, whip in hand. Rick, Archie, two other men, and a woman followed her. They were carrying some boxed items, all with evil leers on their faces. Kent and Karen and even Annie froze at the seductive yet menacing manner in which Renee strode towards them, and she had eyes only for Karen. Kent quickly stood up, moving to place himself between Renee and Karen.

“Please Renee, leave Karen out of this, please.”, Kent begged. “Karen’s not up to all this suffering and torture, she can’t take it. Please Renee...”. Annie rolled her eyes at Kent’s naiveté. She knew what this would bring down on him. Resting her face in her hands she looked down and slowly shook her head.

Renee struck snake-like at Kent, her leer instantly replaced by a cold glare. With one fist she grasped his testicles in a tight, painful grip, her gaze never leaving Karen. “What did you call me? Who gave you permission to call me that?”, she slowly hissed, pausing between each word for effect. Her cohorts watched with amusement.

Kent’s mind exploded in agony. Her grip was so strong and merciless that it felt as though his balls were in a vise. The agony caused him to bend his knees slightly, exacerbating his condition. “I-I’m...sorry! I-I-I’m s-sorry!”, he gasped in torment.

Renee tightened her fist even more. “You’re sorry, what?”, she demanded.

“I’m... sorry... Mistress!”, Kent pleaded, barely able to force out the words.

Renee turned slowly and looked at Kent until their eyes were only inches apart. She removed her diabolical-looking devil mask and tossed it on the table.

“Don’t EVER make me have to teach you that again, if you want to keep these.”, she replied coldly before placing her boot in his chest and shoving him twisting down to land on his chest on the floor. As Kent writhed on the ground wretchedly, he felt Renee’s boot land hard between his shoulder blades.

“Stay down, worm.”, she commanded, keeping her exquisite thigh-high booted leg firmly planted on his back.

“I don’t think he has the ‘nads to stand up at the moment.”, Rick jeered, his mirth joined by other four.

Turning back to Karen, Renee’s Cheshire cat smile was in place again. “Let’s see, you wanted to know just how much worse it can get for you?”, she asked huskily. “Ooohhhhh, things can get very bad for you. I’ve

tried only a fraction of what I know on you.”, Renee said, crooking her forefinger at Karen and beckoning her forward. As Karen stepped uncertainly towards her, Renee wrapped her whip loosely around her neck and drew her forcibly to her until they stood face to face. “And I know quite a lot.”, she smirked. Releasing the whip, she then folded her arms and looked Karen’s naked flesh up and down, licking her lips. Karen trembled visibly, trying to look down at the floor but unable to tear her gaze away from her tormentor’s. Renee began to giggle.

“Why, what’s the matter, my pet? I haven’t even touched you tonight and yet you fear what I’m going to do? I find that simply...” she reached forward and put a gloved hand behind Karen’s head, roughly grasping the back of her hair and drawing her ever closer. “Delicious.”, Renee purred into Karen’s ear, a wicked grin on her face. Her lips grazed Karen’s cheek, and her tongue lightly tasted her skin with satisfaction. Karen shut her eyes and folded her lips closed upon themselves in trepidation. She seemed to be fighting to keep from bursting into tears.

“When it comes right down to it, I don’t have to do a thing to you, sweetie, even though...”, Renee paused, carefully removing her right glove slowly and bringing her talon-like painted thumb and forefinger fingernails to Karen’s left breast nipple. Slowly she began to pinch and rub them together, the pressure from her nails getting stronger and stronger until Karen was hopping from one foot to the other due to the pain. Her head was arched back, eyes screwed tightly shut, and her jaw dropped, mouthing gasps of distress, much to the amusement of Renee and her hirelings.

“Even though, I do enjoy it so.”, she chuckled. “No, my dear wifey,” she said, releasing Karen’s nipple and replacing her glove, “in order to hurt you, all I have to do is ...”, she paused for effect. Then she took the whip from around Karen’s neck, walked a few steps away, and then with a flourish whirled around and brought it expertly over her head and zinging down on Kent’s bare ass. “... hurt your dear husband.”, she finished.

The whip shot like a ribbon of fire across Kent’s buttocks, and he screamed at the sudden terrible burning sensation. Renee looked at Kent lying on the floor, his bare body contorted in suffering, and practically drooled at the sight. ‘My God!’, she thought, ‘How could I have ever forgotten how much fun these two are? We are definitely going to make more vids with them.’ She raised the whip for another blow.

“No! Please, don’t...”, Karen began. Renee quickly shot her a predatory look. But Karen swiftly dropped to her knees and slowly moved over to Renee until her lowered head was almost touching her abdomen. “P-please Mistress, please don’t hurt my husband. I’ll... do... anything... we’ll, we’ll do anything you say, a-anything.”, Karen begged, lips trembling.

Renee lowered her whip and looked down at Karen with satisfaction. She gently put a hand under her chin and slowly pushed Karen’s head back and traced a forefinger across her lips. “That’s a good girl. Nice to see the both of you are finally on the team at last. I take good care of my toys, and I have a soft spot for you two. You’re the only hubby and wifey I have, which makes you special to me. And I’ve seen how Archie’s been mistreating you two. I’ll have a word.” she said, looking over at the group at one in particular, who shuffled quickly to the back of the pack, “or two with him after tonight. O.k.?” Renee kissed Karen on the lips for good measure. She nudged Kent with her boot. “You may rise.”, she said.

Tears began to fill Karen’s eyes and run down her cheeks. “Please, Mistress, after tonight, couldn’t you... couldn’t you let us...let us...?”

Renee looked at Karen in quizzically. “Let you what?”, she inquired.

“Mistress?”, Kent asked. He had rolled over awkwardly and moved over to kneel by Karen. Renee looked from one to the other, puzzled.





“What Karen means to say is, after tonight, will you... will you... let us go?” , Kent said hopefully. “If it’s money you want our families can come up with it, I know.”, Kent pleaded. “And we won’t press charges or get involved with the police, we promise.” Karen nodded with Kent in unison. “We just want to go home, Mistress, we’ll do anything to go home. Won’t you let us go?”

Renee looked at the two incredulously. Then she looked at her confederates and began to scream with laughter.

“Oh, that’s rich, that’s just too much!”, she howled derisively, joined by her colleagues.

Kent and Karen looked at each other, mystified. Renee was holding her sides, weary from hilarity. She finally sighed and turned to face the two, wiping away tears. “Oh my, my, my.”, she replied. “The both of you just don’t get it, do you?”

She tossed her whip on the breakfast table and, picking the lantern off the table, walked to an old roll top desk nearby. She unlocked and opened it, slid open a drawer and took out some papers. Then she closed and locked the desk and walked back, holding out a few pages of paper for the both of them to read.

“What are these?”, Kent asked, trying to make out the writing.

Karen quickly looked at the header at the top of the pages, lit by the dim lantern. Her eyes widened at what she read. “Oh, my God.”, Karen exclaimed.

Renee looked at Karen with a vicious smile. “Bingo! Right the first time! You two are my property, as in slaves, as per the Hong Kong International Trade Emporium., Ltd. It’s a front for an operation in which I make sizable monetary contributions in return for weapons, equipment, drugs, or in your case, slaves. According to these documents, which are written in proper legalese, in return for being taken care of financially, emotionally, or, just ‘cause you’re into that kind of thing, you two agreed to belong to me, body and soul, to do with as I want.”, Renee revealed. “And we’re going to spend a cozy, fruitful time together. Or, at least I will.”, she smiled wickedly.

“We didn’t sign these! They’re a forgery!”, Kent exclaimed, looking at his handwriting at the bottom. Karen tilted her head back and began to sob piteously.

“Oh, now, yes you did. They will pass the muster of any forensic handwriting expert. Our operation is very talented. Having acquired your driver’s licenses made it very easy. It’s a shame you decided to take your vacation in Jamaica instead of the Bahamas. Crime rates’ much higher in Jamaica, you see. And once we saw two lovebirds dancing on a remote beach one night, well... you two just couldn’t resist a free drink from that nice waiter, could you? Then it was a simple matter of packing the two of you off in crates to... well, your current home sweet home, shall we say?” Renee smirked, opening her arms wide to encompass the room they were in.

There was a short pause as the sickening truth caught hold of the two of them. Karen dropped her head to Kent’s shoulder and leaned against him, still crying. Then Kent asked, “How long do you intend to keep us as your... property?”, Kent inquired, quickly adding, “Mistress?”

Renee cocked her head to one side, considering Kent’s query. “Good question. You two are not exactly in your prime, but can hold up for a good five or six years of abuse, I think. But what we usually do after you’ve outlived your purpose is sell you to get whatever we can for you.” Renee took a closer look at the two



before nodding her head. "I think we could get a fair price for you, Karen. The Sudan can always use another Muslim slave." Karen's eyes grew wide with terror. "As for Kent here, well, Siberia needs miners, so I hear."

Kent looked at her in horror. "You'd break us up? We'd never see each other again?" Renee folded the papers and returned them to the desk. Then she walked back and looked at them for a minute before replying.

"You really love one another and it shows, and as long as that holds out, I'll keep you. So make sure you keep the home fires burning for each other, so to speak, because as soon as the intensity between you two fades, then it's off to parts unknown. It's nothing personal, just business." With a look at her hirelings and a nod of her head at Kent and Karen, the two saw Renee's grinning minions approaching them, carrying the ominous looking boxes.

"That's why you bought us, to just have around to torture for your amusement?", Kent asked, shocked at Renee's nonchalance.

"Well, sort of.", Renee replied. "But the main reason is video sales. We don't just torture you, we also record it, and sell it world wide to our ever-growing fan base. We hid the cameras last time, but we talked about it, and the humiliation value of knowing you're going to be seen performing not only tonight but all across the world will add to the shoot, don't you think?", she sneered at them.

Kent looked at Renee in wonder, amazed that someone so horrid could even exist. Karen turned a hateful, tear-streaked glare to Renee. Her crying speech was punctuated by gasps for air.

"You evil,... \*sob\*... evil... bitch... \*sob\*... I... I... \*sob\*...pity... you... "

Renee's malicious features turned to cold hate. She whirled an outstretched arm at Karen and the loud slap of her hand stung hard against her cheek and dropped her to the floor. With a vengeful cry, Kent launched himself at her, but was immediately seized and held fast by Rick and Archie.

Renee straddled Karen's prone, weeping form. "That, you stupid idiot, is going to cost you big time. Apparently you still haven't learned your lesson yet. But, we have all night, and I'm going to really enjoy breaking you, every minute of it."

Fuck the Care Bears, These are the Terror Bears!



<http://www.etsy.com/shop/quietroombear>

# QUIET ROOM BEARS



session 38

# QUIET ROOM BEARS



SESSION 36



session 14

# QUIET ROOM BEARS



session 45

Yes, they move! Horrifying Video here: [www.youtube.com/user/JohnnyFilmMaker](http://www.youtube.com/user/JohnnyFilmMaker)



# SHADOWS ON THE WALL: A HISTORY OF HORROR CINEMA

## PART ONE- A PLATFORM FOR TERROR.

BY ANTHONY COWIN.

From the dawn of the cinematic age, a time even before cinemas existed, people were being shocked by films. The great urban legend has it that people ran screaming from the small rooms the Lumière brothers set up their equipment to screen their fifty second 1896 silent piece, 'The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station'. "*Is that really horror?*" you may ask. Well regardless of the inflated responses recalled in the legends, people were genuinely shocked and horrified by this great iron train pulling into a station platform only feet in front of them. Not to mention the magic of it approaching out of nowhere other than a white wall. Audiences must have felt a primal connection to the ghostly shadows dancing across fire lit walls as parents read terrifying fairy tales to them as children.

It was obvious even then in an age where being a medium and holding a séance could make you rich, that film had the potential to rattle the money from the pockets of terrified customers. If millions of people, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle included, were so easily duped by photographs taken by two young girls showing cut out fairies frolicking at the bottom garden, imagine if those mythical creatures had actually danced.

Cinema began in an age of innocence. A world caught between technology and superstition. In other words, film came at just the right time and horror would be one of the key reasons why it would prove to be such a huge success.

In the twenty five years between the Lumière brothers train and the Cottinely fairies cinema grew up on a steady diet of horror. Georges Méliès sci-fi masterpiece, A Trip to the Moon, flickered on screens a mere eight years after the parlour trick train shocked people for a few pennies in a darkened room. Méliès understood the power of cinema. He had an instinct tuned from the gothic age that informed him of the potential and riches ripe for the picking in shock cinema.

The first time I ever watched that tubular rocket hit the eye of the Moon I felt frightened. It was as strong an emotion as the behind-the-sofa scares of Dr Who in my childhood. So I can only guess how truly terrifying and magical that piece of cinematic playfulness must have been to contemporary eyes. Of course the great pioneers are recognised now for the work they did and the templates they set down. But another form of horror gave audiences real nightmares in those emerging times.

World War One was the first cinematic war. Today in an age of 24 hour rolling news we are used to seeing wars played out live in our own living rooms. While this has journalist merit it soon sanitises us to the horrors of war. Imagine then watching flickering monochrome images of real death play in front of you in a communal theatre. Bodies being torn to pieces by weapons you couldn't have even imaged existed. Those men could be your father, brother and maybe very soon, even you.

The stark realism, with a good dose of theatrical input from directors, brought the horrors of real life into our consciousness. This wasn't a stuffy book recounting tales of hand on hand combat in the Boer war your grandfather may have read to you. This was here and now. This was real.

Pathe's Animated Gazettes made people realise that motion pictures not only surpassed still photography for telling a story, but they even made printed words seem outdated. It's funny to think in a digital age when people worry about the extinction of print with each new e-reader or tablet device, that newspapers felt exactly the same concern about the Pathe newsreels almost a century ago.

After the dust of war had settled people had had their fill of horror. Who could blame them? If you feel tired after ninety minutes of Paranormal Activity imagine a whole world exhaling after four years of brutal war. Only a few years after people had paid good money to see creature features like Méliès 'A Terrible Night' or Herbert Brenon 1913 version of 'Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde' they began to tire of the genre. Luckily the young men and women who had grown up on those films and still read the scary books under dim light wanted more. While the fathers of the dawn of the twentieth century wanted nothing more than to laugh away the horror and destruction they had witnessed with comedy and westerns, the younger generation knew horror as a cinematic genre hadn't even begun.

There's obviously a velvet thread that ties early 19<sup>th</sup> century silent shockers, the Pathe Newsreels and the rise of political cinema that leads all the way to the first golden age of horror in the 1920s. D.W. Griffith's socio-political masterpiece 'Intolerance' (1916) showed the world how sweeping plotlines, multi character arcs and innovative techniques could tell a unique story. One thing Griffith's was also acutely aware of was the currency of shock. While 'Intolerance' may still be regarded as the greatest silent film its success relied as much on shocking the audience as either the historical education or ground breaking techniques. The same too could be said of his earlier masterpiece 'Birth of a Nation' (1915) though which is now rightly viewed as nothing more than racist propaganda.

Griffith's more than questionable politics and themes aside, his films did change the art of cinematic storytelling. The constraints of filmmaking were ripped apart like the chains of Liberty. Suddenly anything was possible and more importantly, everything was expected. The invention of pioneers like Griffith's and the European art house cinema culminated at a time when a thirst for a darker drama was rising. Maybe the memories of war were fading or people needed to think that horror wasn't real at a time when mankind reflected upon its own near destruction. Wherever the trickle broke is of no consequence, there was a fountain ready to burst into action that would quench the thirst and lay the foundations of horror cinema as we know it to this day.

I suppose most people will tell you the first true horror feature was 'The Cabinet of Dr Caligari' (1919) and in many ways it was. It's often cited as the first real modern example of the movement. Robert Wiene built a pyramid laying foundations stones from Méliès and the Lumières. He stacked up the rocks of Pathe's reality, European art film and the dramatic elegance of Griffith's to bring us the poster boy film of the German Expressionist movement.

'Dr Caligari' was horror unlike anything that had preceded it. It utilised any technique that suited the scene while mixing an explosive cocktail of blunt realism and European experimentation. It's fair to say it shocked the world. Its influences can still be witnessed today in many K-Horror titles, especially director Hideo Nakata's work such as 'Ringu' (1998). Its legacy can even be felt in the 'Paranormal Activity' franchise (2007-2012). These films often expose fissures that allow the history of the genre to shine through like a light from the Big Bang of horror cinema. The Long/medium/close up shot arrangement of the Lumière's train arriving can be seen in films like Nakata's 'Dark Water' (2002) for example.





11/29/11  
[Signature]



The Expressionist movement expanded and filtered into other films over the next couple of decades. The seminal 'Nosferatu' (1922) with the shadowy Max Schreck offering a performance that influenced most vampire films up until the 'Twilight' series. Lon Chaney's ground breaking performance as the Phantom in 'Phantom Of The Opera' (1925), Peter Lorre's depraved performance in Fritz Lang's "M" (1930) along with many others gave horror a respectability in the cinema world that made Hollywood very happy and kept European directors in work for a long while.

It wasn't just the stars that created this golden age of horror. Two other changes to the film industry, and genre movies in general, finally capped off the emerging horror movement and brought it into maturity. Of course the first paradigm shift was the introduction of sound in film which destroyed the silent pioneers almost overnight. Not many directors, stars or even studios survived that tumultuous push.

The other evolution was the casting of tropes. While these well-worn stereotypes of genre may seem dusty and uninventive now, the likes of Dracula, Frankenstein and even those pesky untangling bandaged mummies were a revelation to an audience craving for escapist entertainment. I personally consider horror to be the purest form of escapism. It's a land when no rules exist and anything seems possible. But after years of twisting classic books into almost unrecognisable films the horror genre hit a bump. The Lumière train was about to be derailed. Horror created stars and introduced new monsters from its carefully lifted content during the interwar period. This meant the studios were making a lot of money for very little outlay. They realised the smaller the budget the greater the profit the movies would return. After all people filled theatres to watch anything they released. They produced sequel after sequel until all the classics were reduced to diluted ghosts of themselves or unintentional parodies. They mixed monsters and genres, made horror films using their comedy stable and generally stripped the genre of all its dignity. Horror was a joke. Audiences began to tire of it all. This all happened at the worst possible point in time.

While the 'talkies' became as common as conversation a different tune echoed in the distance. The unsettling buzz of war once again neared. The horrors of the WW1 were only beginning to fade as the darkest period of mankind's history stepped ever closer. The Second World War would make horror cinema seem pointless and all too often, unnecessarily disrespectful. Uncertain of the future and once again facing horrors more terrifying than anything on screen, people turned away in droves.

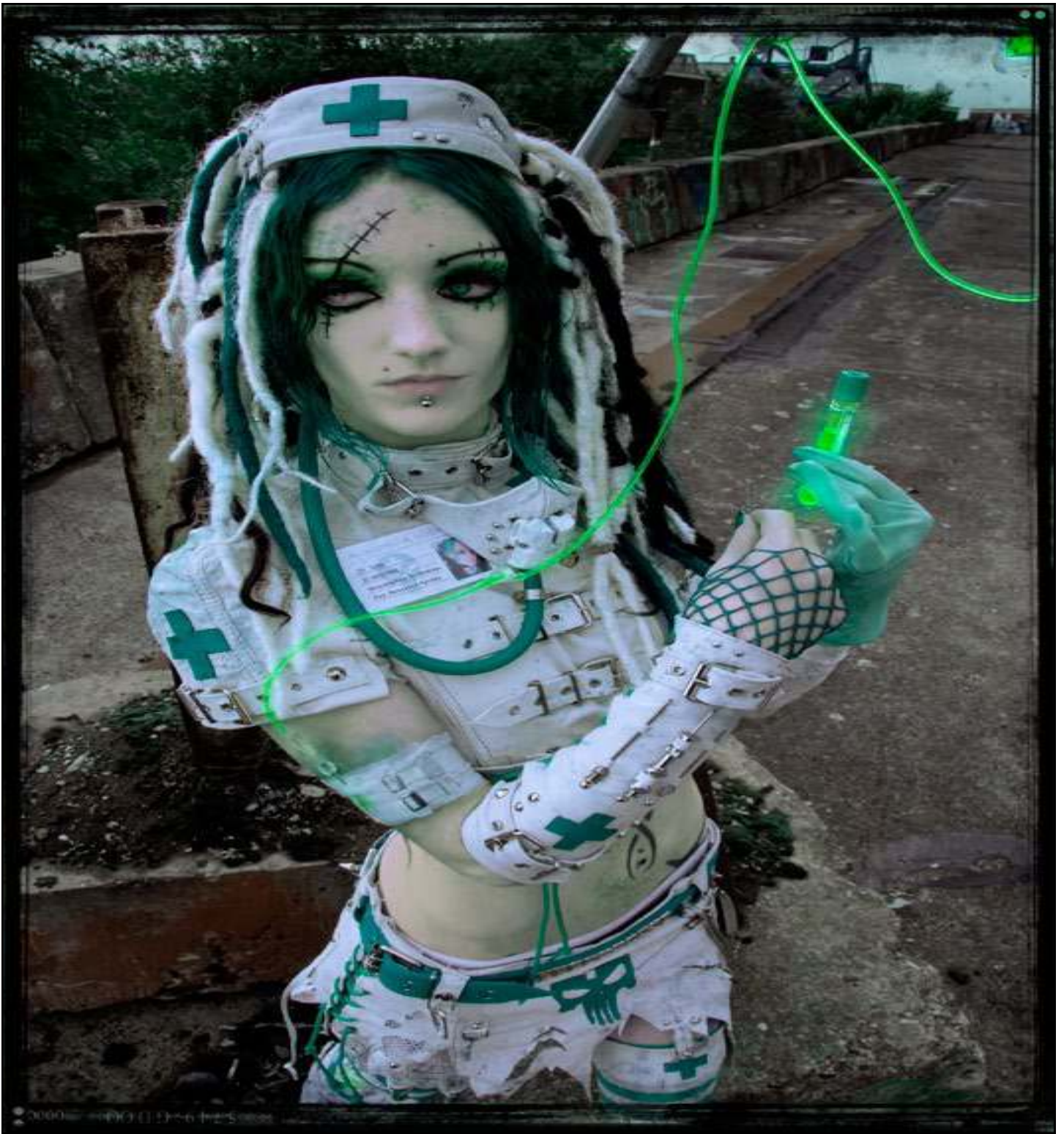
Would horror cinema ever regain the respect and inventiveness it once held in abundance?

Next- Shadows on the Wall: Part Two- If I had a Hammer.









**Next Issue:  
CYBERPUNK UNLOADED**

